



Adjacencies and Distances: Sculptural site intervention

A project submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for
Master of Fine Art by Research

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Robbie Rowlands
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Abstract

Within the urban landscape, the tempo of destruction and redevelopment of our built environment reveals a palimpsest of change. The abandonment of these sites could go unnoticed, often a fleeting moment before destruction, with the next structure then re-cloaking the land. This research project locates itself spatially and conceptually within this pause or transitional state of select sites. It utilises this brief period of time to consider how these sites can offer poetic information and new readings as creative practice, despite their impending obsolescence.

Through my work, I engaged physically with sites through various material intervention processes. Cutting, slicing, reconfiguring the surfaces and the structural integrity of these sites becomes a visceral engagement, bringing with it an urgency, an intensity, and a consequentiality. They are emphatic gestures that stand in contrast to the obsolescence of the space, but at the same time reveal the layered nature of not just the physical but also the metaphorical and memorial constructions of these built structures.

Adjacencies and distances, prompts us to re-evaluate our proximity and understanding of everything around us. Drawing attention to what may go unnoticed, the research within these sites highlights how these spaces can hold a degree of separation from their previous function; an autonomy within the context of our built landscape. The human presence in these sites becomes one aspect of many, rather than the sole reason for their existence.

My investigations and subsequent interventions into sites reflect prominently on my own sense of how I read the environment. Reflecting on what is known within these sites and finding some distance here with an aim to create some sense of ambiguity; to un-know and/or to re-know what may have been hidden. The fluctuation between these two states, knowing and unknowing becomes a rich area of research opening up greater ways for me to challenge my perceptions within site and then to spatially respond to these in the form of sculptural interventions.

Through the exploration of further material process and techniques, such as photography, film and sound, this practice-led research project has allowed me to expand my capacity to capture and extend my observations and sculptural interventions. This documentation, in light of the loss of the physical sites and work, is then to become a crucial path back to the experience of a site. Whilst this does not reproduce the full liveness of the experience, I see it as a step towards understanding my thinking at the time. Each photograph, film or sound document, then, is like a word that can return you to a sentence, a memory, a moment.

This final document is written foremost from the perspective of being in site, and the reflections derived from these experiences. From here, I explore current thinking and artist practices that broaden the reflective writing, deriving a statement of research outcomes that balances an analytical understanding of my journey with the poetic.



Adjacencies and Distances: Sculptural Site Intervention

Robbie Rowlands

Introduction

The resourcing of modest, utilitarian, outmoded buildings as the prime subjects for sculptural responsive projects has been central to my practice for the last 20 years. Situated in the experience of ordinary life, these buildings fall under the radar of official heritage status and their significance is held purely in the way they have supported humanity in our everyday activities. There is quite possibly an innate archaeologist within me that inspires this engagement with our built environment. 'Knowing for yourself' is how anthropologist Tim Ingold (2013, 1) considers this, 'To know things you have to grow into them, and let them grow in you, so that they become a part of who you are'.

Adjacencies and Distances, is a practice-led research that aims to expand my understanding of how our built environments, in their retired states, have the capacity to reveal important information through sculptural practice. Within this, the objectives are to consider how the status of abandonment and loss - demolition - reveals qualities of a site that can be artistically researched and redefined. To explore sculptural techniques and processes that expand on my previous approaches, and to produce site responsive outcomes that can be experienced through exhibition.

Through this research I draw on direct experience, sometimes fleeting, in sites. This became a critical way of dealing with the varied conditions of the sites. These ranged from a site unentered for years to a freshly vacated site that still had a wifi connection. A site that still had the odour, belongings and a lingering fragility of past occupants to a site that possessed a grandeur and deep connections to the community it had served.

This research is located spatially and conceptually within site-specific arts practice. There is a rich history here that began with the awakening of artists and institutions in the 1960s to the importance of the conditions of site (Kraus 1977). Here, the critical relationship between artist and their subject spaces set a challenge to how we engage with the environments in which we work and live. The title of this dissertation *Adjacencies and Distances* responds to this, drawing influence from art historian Miwon Kwon's (Kwon 2002, 166) prompt in her book *One place after another: site-specific art and locational identity*, for site-specific practice to 'address the unevenness of everything that is situated around us.'

I have also drawn on artists and writers who support and broaden my thinking. How we value space through tangible structures is explored in the work of sculptor Rachel Whiteread with her seminal work *House* (1993) which was a particular early influence in my artistic practice. Whilst my capacity to experience her work has been limited, *House* (1993) as a work, and the text surrounding it, was significant enough to reach beyond the page, challenging my understanding of the values of space and our reliance on physical definable structures to add proof of their existence. Throughout the research I continue to draw on artists and writers who explore the notion of space. I look at the work of photomedia artist Dr Alison Bennett in the context of how she encounters space. Bennett first introduced me to the text by architectural writer Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin* (1996). This aligned our thinking in terms of how our sensorial biases need to be challenged.

In looking further at how I perceive space, I reflect on the work and words of artist James Turrell, in how he values light, revealing our relationship to it and its capacity to entice or respond. Sculptor Carl Andre features here also in terms of perceptual change in how an object can be defined as a cut. I look at the displacement created by artists Natasha Johns-Messenger and Leslie Eastman's work in terms of the cut. I reference sculptor Gordon Matta-Clark's work - there is an obvious long history of influence here in my practice - with his want to find ambiguity in a site. In its undoing I see the ambiguity as an attempt to un-know. There is a subtle suggestion of artist Richard Long's performative work *Dusty Boots Line Sahara* in considering the action of a cut line as a journey one could take across water or a field. And finally the politics of the cut is highlighted in the work of Doris Salcedo with *Shibboleth I*, the Tate gallery floor cut which challenges history's resolutions. Even in these few examples, the richness and potential of working with site can be revealed.

I use the term poetic throughout my writing to consider outcomes and awareness that loosen up perceptions. It serves in part to create distance to what usually seems so matter-of-fact. As French philosopher Gaston Bachelard states when referring to the notion of 'the house', the poetic resides in the richness of unalterable 'oneirisms' or dreamlike

feelings that does not 'readily lend themselves to description' (1994, 13). This ambiguity and dreamlike unknowing here is particularly important throughout the research. This extends through to the challenges of writing - in attempting to capture these experiences, I write through, rather than about the experience.

I use the term 'intervention' in connection to my direct responses to working with site. The history of this term's usage in art parallels in time with the growth in site-specific practice. With groups such as the late 1960's Artist Placement Group (APG) whose core aims were to reformulate art's relations to industry, 'as an extremely significant attempt to move art beyond the gallery' (James 2013, Issue 153). Intervention defines an intention to find ways for arts practice to work with and within diverse social and environmental situations with an aim to challenge and even subvert. In this dissertation, I begin to consider how the notion of intervention reflects back on me. The sites and situations I contend with here test my complacency. They set challenges to the lineage and sequentially of history revealing how space holds unbiased memory once dominant framings are challenged. This process reveals the capacity to undo what I know, allowing access to quieter, older and alternate histories.

Within each site my methods cycle through processes of observation, reflection and sculptural action allowing each to inform the other. The dissertation writing follows this journey creating a distinct narrative path. This begins with the approach to site, then working within site and following through to what I define as 'the cut'. I utilise reflective writing, developed in the moment, to draw out energy and thinking that extends through the dissertation. Project timelines are displaced to capture the overall experience of this research. In doing so, I present the moments that best reflect the current thinking developed through the writing.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How can sculptural practice, employed within abandoned pre-demolition buildings, question how we value space?

How can processes of decay and deconstruction, be utilised in the production of site responsive sculptural works?

OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

A brief synopsis of the dissertation narrative is as follows:

Part I: *Approaching site* explores the actual approach to a site prior to entry. Here I look at the notion of boundaries as I consider what conditions are in play. I contend with the rights and responsibilities of entering a site even with official permissions. In Chapter 1: *Constraints*, I consider the initial conditions of a site at the first point of entry – standing on the back step. I look at what this initial threshold means in the process of approaching a site. Chapter 2: *Trespass*, considers the resistance of a boundary, exploring how we determine our sense of belonging to, or breach of, a site's conditions. I ask, am I always trespassing? Chapter 3: *Permissions*, explores the difficulties faced when determining and negotiating the conditions of a site, revealing how fraught this can be at times, but also how rewarding.

Part II: *Within site*, transitions past the boundaries and thresholds this research explored in *Approaching site*, to consider new boundaries and thresholds within site. Lines fluctuate here between knowing and unknowing. I reveal how I move through a site with instincts heightened, questioning the competency and the capacity for these environments to feed creative outcomes. In Chapter 4: *What matters*, I reveal how I find closeness and distance from what I am observing, challenging my perception of what matters. Lines fluctuate here between knowing and unknowing. There is a consideration of the changing of values, meanings and usefulness of what I am experiencing. Chapter 5: *Capricious*, attempts to hold onto the uncertainty and first impressions of a site after first entry. Realising that before long my perceptions of a site can transition to one of knowing when actually the richness is in the unknowing. Chapter 6: *Everything placed has its purpose*, is a poetic reading of action and observations. Chapter 7: *Access(ion)*, explores how I challenged my perceptions of a space finding other ways to access the dimensions of a site and so inspiring new modes of exploration. Chapter 8: *Light(ness)*, explores how light, or lack of, can guide my experience of a site. Here I explore the site's capacity to have agency in terms of noticing.

Part III: *The cut*, forms the last movement of this dissertation. Suggesting a much anticipated action that would see the introduction of sculptural methods traditionally employed in my practice, here the cut becomes something else. Through perceiving changes in a site this movement encapsulates rich discoveries of how the cut can be considered in broader terms than saw to surface. Even with this action employed in site, the cut pauses in the moment to consider the meaning that is held in this moment. In Chapter 9: *Cut of light*, I draw on my observation practice to define the cut as inspired by light. Here I consider how light can guide my awareness in site and in itself define a break in knowing. Chapter 10: *Held*, considers the moment after a physical cut: saw to surface. Pausing to consider what information is held in this moment. Chapter 11: *The fall*, celebrates the poetic readings of the research feedback session in a site. Chapter 12: *Sharp line and feathered edge*, this final chapter explores the performative action of the cut, its threshold and the complexities of this intervention in a public space.





FIGURE 2. Back step, Belfield, 2016

Part I: APPROACHING SITE

Standing at a threshold is an uncertain experience, and so it should be. A threshold defines a quality that must be exceeded for a certain reaction. A reaction that then in itself may be exceeded. There is an enlivened relationship between what is known and what is unknown here, which encourages greater consideration of this very moment. What I consider here at the beginning of this practice-led research dissertation is my initial approach to site. **Part I: *Approaching site*** is positioned at the threshold prior to entering a site. Here, I question how values can adjust the degree of tension at these points and determine what rights and responsibilities need to be considered and acknowledged. *Approaching site* considers a gradual movement forward. One that begins to comprehend all that I'm experiencing.



FIGURE 3. Exterior view, Belfield, 2016

Chapter 1: Constraints

The front door is screwed shut with police business cards jammed into the frame. The back door is the entry point and possibly the escape route. The lean-to at the back is knee deep with the belongings of past occupants strewn throughout, as if the house actually attempted to purge itself. I hesitate to enter, as I have done before (due to the uncertainty of occupancy), but this time I feel slightly more confident of its emptiness. I implemented a simple set of tests, maybe you could call them traps, set up at the door - an old computer case - to see if anything changed in the time between visits. It's the hesitation here that I'm interested in. There is an element of fear, of the unknown, of the encounter of whatever that may be. There is also a hesitation at this threshold, as if a line will be crossed that implicates me in some kind of trespass.

Belfield — 2-7-16

As I begin to consider what potential a site can hold, the pause here, on the concrete back step of an abandoned house, allows time to tease out what information is held in this moment. What interests me here is the notion of boundaries. Are these fixed boundaries, or do they shift, morph and change depending on the individual or the circumstances? At times a site may have a clear delineation of a boundary: a fence, gate or even a hand-painted sign. In most cases there are what we could term official permissions granted. But even here there is still the sense of other boundaries in play. Something less defined by law and more to do with unofficial rights. Boundaries that are negotiated in terms of how we form society's structures, of informal rights that may barely be defined. Existing only in the feeling we have when we come close or cross them.

We could consider boundaries in more fluid or elastic terms. Art critic Nick Kaye (2002, 150) in *Site-specific art: performance, place and documentation* suggests, 'There is no solid or stable ground to be established as the site'. In Kaye's understanding of site, whilst it is not particularly solid or stable, its wholeness is formed by a 'complex of chemical, organic, physiological and biological systems, interacting with one another, and so a complex of relations always in process'. In my own understanding of site I see the complexities here in terms of how I determine its boundaries. I realise through vision I can overstep a boundary. Air currents and light, dust, scent and even animals can pass this point, but once my body passes over its threshold or even if I contemplate the action of crossing over, entering within, I can't help but acknowledge a restrictive feeling.

There are negotiations in order here that may not be as clear as the granting of official permissions when working with a site. These are possibly unwritten rights and part of a complex aggregate in terms of how we navigate the boundaries of private and public. Whilst I will delve further into these complexities later in *Approaching site*, it's worth considering artist Rachel Whiteread in negotiating the boundaries in play here from a position of public to private and vice versa. The sculptural methods Whiteread employs stem from her long history of casting the interior and under-surfaces of objects and spaces. What positions Whiteread's work significantly within the thinking around boundaries is how through the destruction of the cast form, the division between interior and exterior is removed. Through this act, Whiteread reveals boundaries through their actual destruction.

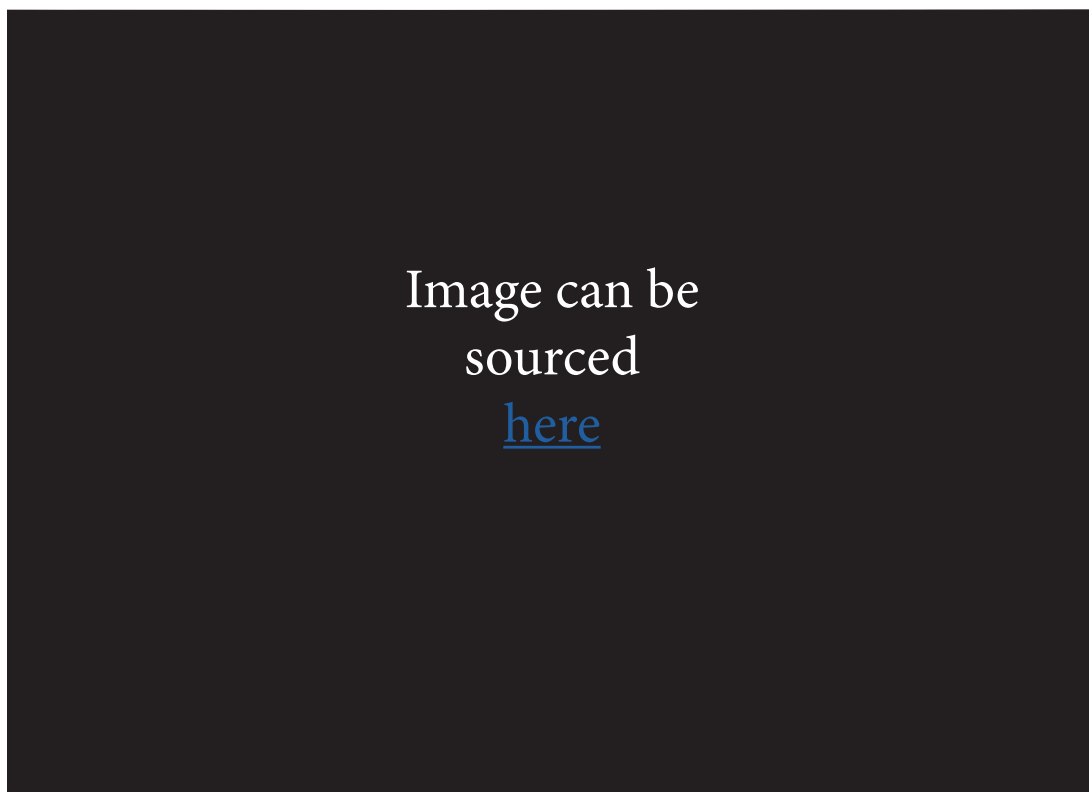


FIGURE 4. Rachel Whiteread, [House, 1994](#)
All Rights Reserved, DACS 2016. Photo: John Davies, Silver gelatine fibre print

Whiteread's 1993 work, *House* is a perfect example when considering the divisional boundaries between public and private. Here, Whiteread set to the complex task of cementing the interior surfaces of a double-storey terrace house. Once the exterior structure was stripped away, what was revealed was a perfectly solidified cast of the interior spaces. In this instant Whiteread exposed the complexities of what delineates one from the other, public and private, but also converted one to the other, or a fluctuation between the two. The interior surfaces cast in raw concrete, exposed the intimacy of these spaces. The concrete form with subtle interior surface details (now exterior) revealed the once hidden domestic social space, placing it in full naked view, unprotected and vulnerable to not only the elements, but to gaze and political debate that surrounded the work. The usual protections that even the humblest of structures, boundaries, afforded us were removed in this act.

What Whiteread does is question what this bounded form means to us. What we determine as the house. Is it the structure or is it the space that it contains? Whiteread had always considered the work to be temporary. The work's existence in the landscape was fleeting, but in this moment Whiteread created a monument to the significance of a space so easily forgotten. *House* eloquently, 'memorialized the presence of the past in the present' (Whiteread, Bird, 1995, 116). In the destruction of Whiteread's work, there is an activation of a greater understanding of the significance and existence of the social space she solidified. Does Whiteread's House and the space that it defined still stand in that open parkland? Through its destruction does it open up broader discussion around how we value space?

The uncertainty I felt standing on the back step at this boundary of the Belfield site was not whether I had arrived there before or after another – at the time I didn't know if the squatters had left – but what were the conditions in terms of rights and responsibilities there? Opening up a consideration in broader terms of how I consider public and private space and how I define and reflect on the significance of the histories in play here gave reason for this pause and hesitation to enter.

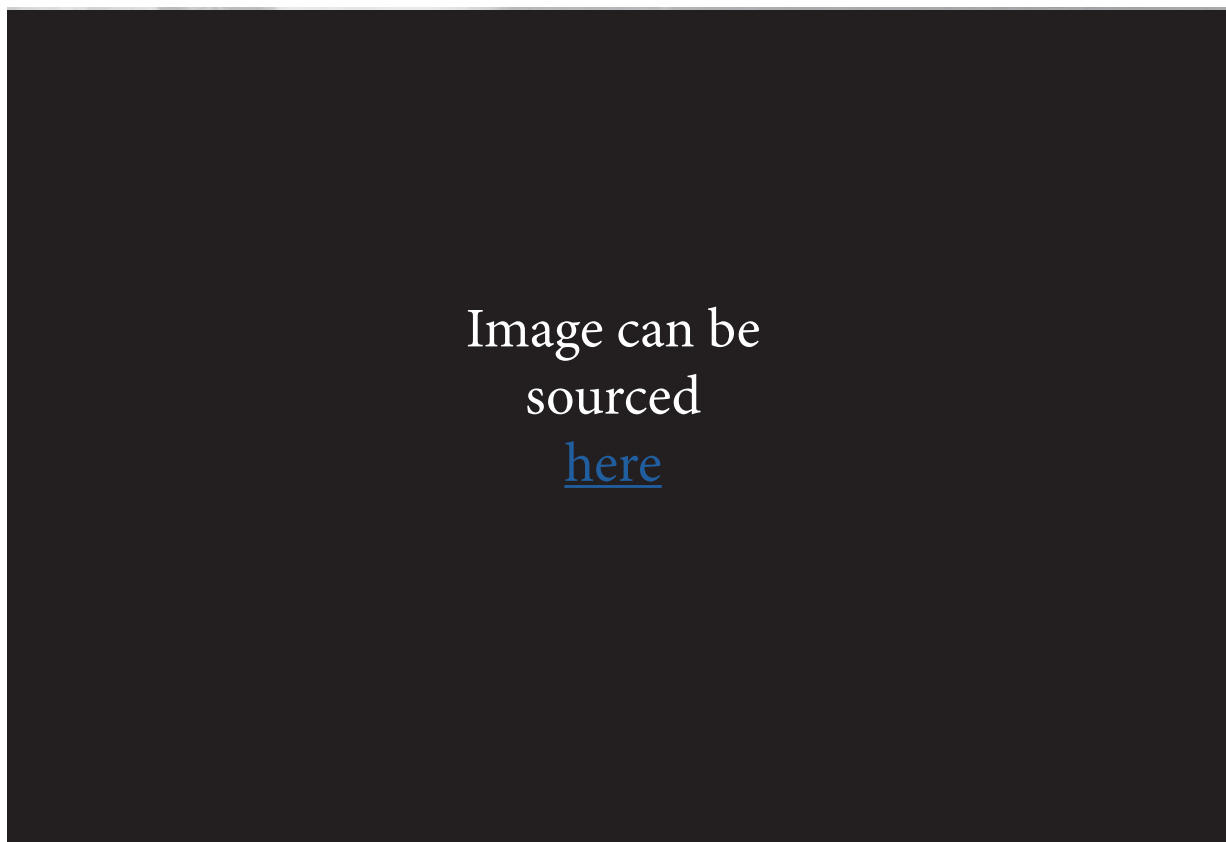


FIGURE 5. Rachel Whiteread, [House, after demolition](#)
All Rights Reserved, DACS 2016. Photo: John Davies, Silver gelatine fibre print



FIGURE 6. The Owl Barn – Sign, 2018

Chapter 2: Trespass

We drive to the outskirts of the town, Broken Hill. They call it nine-mile. I am told there is an abandoned museum dedicated to Owls. The drive is exhilarating, with the sheer wonder of what may lie ahead as we drive through the desert. We approach the site, a modest collection of cream coloured shed-like structures framed around a corner stone building with no roof or windows - it had suffered a past fire. The signs, hand-painted stating 'no trespass' and 'beware of doe' - I think it meant a dog with the 'g' upside down. We ignore these and head through the gate, through the roofless building and into the backyard. A back door of the shed is open and we proceed inside, having to climb over what appears to be some sort of gift-card display cabinet. From here it is complete wonder - a dusty collection of owl ornaments in the thousands still on display, partly picked over, covered in a fine layer of the desert red dust. Then we hear the ute pull up and the abrupt voice of someone enquiring of our actions.

The Owl Barn — 1-7-18

'Displaced is the most precise word to describe the position of the contemporary artist. Displacement allows us to see the other side of the coin.'

Doris Salcedo
(Basualdo et al. 2000, 35)

In valuing space, we inevitably create boundaries for protection. Foucault in *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* (Foucault 1967, 2) reveals the complexities of unpacking histories and perceptions of space, stating, 'Our life is still governed by a certain number of oppositions that remain inviolable, that our institutions and practices have not yet dared to break down.' He continues, 'these are oppositions that we regard as simple givens.... private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space.... All these are still nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred.' How are we to know when we have struck upon the 'hidden presence' that Foucault alludes to? If we read Foucault's 'oppositions' as a resistance that is felt when a challenge is put forward then we begin to understand these boundaries as thresholds. Ones that have a degree of pushback, where what is deemed in opposition makes us aware of its presence. Even the subtlest points of resistance reveal the presence of a threshold, alerting us that we have come close to their bounds.

In approaching the Owl Barn site, the lines of delineation of trespass, of right and wrong, seemed clear at the time: a hand-painted sign. As I stood in a kind of guilty standoff with the protective neighbour I felt there was potential of gleaning greater information about this site and future permissible access. The exchange reaped the rewards of supplying a week's worth of ringing around. I'll talk further about this in the next chapter, but certainly here the act of crossing over this boundary revealed a threshold and its resistance: the neighbour. It is the resistance here, the activeness of what initially seemed abandoned and forgotten – the neighbour's concern here highlighted a sense of care in play - that amplifies the circumstances around this site and gives me a greater degree of information to respond to.

The challenge here is to reposition emphasis from a - what stood before and what's next? hypothesis, to a more closely attuned consideration of what I am within, and what I am particularly surrounded by. In *One place after another*, art historian Miwon Kwon (2002, 166) writes, cultural practices need to address 'the uneven conditions of adjacencies and distances between one thing, one person, one place, one thought, one fragment next to another, rather than invoking equivalences via one thing after another.' In the last chapter, I loosened up the consideration of boundaries with a realisation that in a sense we are always within them. Therefore, approaching any site threshold will always occur from within the boundaries of another. As I stood in very close proximity to the protective neighbour (his choice not mine), I realise I possibly had trespassed on his terms as soon as I passed the outer limits of Broken Hill, or quite possibly Victoria. (He was adamant that my trespassing began at this border.)

The feeling of discomfort here at this threshold is important. As Kwon writes, 'Often we are comforted by the thought that a place is ours, that we belong to it, even come from it, and therefore are tied to it in some fundamental way' (2002, 166). A grounded connection to place is at most times for me elusive and uncertain. The utopian idea of a comfortable place eludes us and quite possibly there is a reason for this. Kwon presents the hypothesis that the 'wrong place', the one that is 'unfamiliar, disorientating, destabilising, even threatening' could in turn 'expose the instability of the right place' (2002, 157). If we return to Kaye's more fluid reading of site - not solid or stable, possibly the 'wrong' and 'right' place could coexist or even be one and the same depending on, ultimately, how it challenges our notion of self. As connection and disconnection co-existing, like a sine wave, each has the potential to fluctuate around a neutral line, or even be so completely out of phase that they both cease to exist.



FIGURE 7. Owl Barn – Stephens Creek, Broken Hill, 2018



FIGURE 8. – Owl Barn – Stephens Creek, Broken Hill, 2018

Chapter 3: Permissions

With the protective neighbour yelling abuse in my face, I calmly state my intentions as being legitimate and enquire of the owners' whereabouts. I am determined to find out the information here: of ownership and of circumstance. It turns out the owner had retired to an aged-care facility in town, and with a name and a possible address I am off to see if I can, at the very least, find out some history here and, if possible, obtain some sort of permission to access the site. We arrive at the home and ask for a Mitch Powell (the Owl Man). The nurse shows us to his room. At first, Mitch seems a little confused as to our intentions, but warms to us a little. Knowing that outings might be a rare treat, I ask if he would like to visit the Owl Barn for a day trip. Mitch makes no hesitation in saying yes - it turns out he hasn't been back since he was moved to the home two years prior. With permission from the nursing staff and family, we schedule a day trip plus lunch the next day.

The Owl Barn — 10-7-17

I've never been very good at trespassing. I get too nervous and spend more time in these sites worried about being caught than what I hope to experience. Though I do like the feeling within this: a kind of nervousness that keeps my awareness on high alert. I do prefer some sort of approval, as it opens up greater potential for the site – still retaining a degree of unease but allowing a permissible basis to work from. Whilst negotiating access to a site can be unpredictable, is there a position from which we are capable of dealing with a site or circumstance that is out of our bounds without being culpable? In *Semblance and Event*, Philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi (2011, 1) describes this moment as being in the midst. He writes, 'Try as we might an observer's remove, that's where we find ourselves: in the midst of it.' In practical terms, the circumstances of these initial approaches will always be different. With the many sites I've navigated, their precarious nature needs to be accessed on approach and negotiated in real time – in the midst. The Owl Barn negotiation is a key to understanding the rewards of gently overstepping the bounds; experiencing, responding and negotiating the response from here.

It's worth considering the terminology I use when considering my approach to site. Whilst site specificity is the common term for a practice where site is central to the creation of a project, I tend to veer towards responsiveness. Being responsive highlights the necessity to be able to respond to challenges with which I am faced. This might be the environmental or structural conditions of the site, or my own conditions I bring to the site. As much as I bring forth history and knowledge, the challenge is to allow the site room to express its history and knowledge. Kwon (2002, 139) prompts us to 'give' ourselves to an experience of site to avoid the potentiality of a 'colonization of difference'. Why I mention this here is to understand that in responding to a site there has to be an expectation the site will respond to us and this may not be as favourable or amicable as we hope or expect.

To bring forth an example of how things could go drastically wrong, let's look to a 2013 exhibition titled *Manorism*. Set in a former five-star brothel, Cromwell Manor, this exhibition – or, in a sense, intervention – took advantage of a site that had a degree of uncertainty surrounding its forced abandonment. Rumours of a police raid, according to curator Rosie Scott, were, as she stated, 'Somewhat of a mystery'. Other than the disarray of the office, with papers strewn everywhere, the site was left as if still in working order – ready for another day. A team of artists, academics and students went to work recomposing the site, utilising the remnant materials and energies on offer. The underpinning of this show, as far as support, was robust. As Gina Fairley's article in ArtsHub (2013, para. 1) stated, 'Who'd have thought a brothel, a social enterprise and one of the country's leading educational institutions would come together on a project that creatively fuses artists, architects and designers?' Photographer Christian Pearson had already, prior to the show, photographed the site in its frozen state wanting not to place any judgment on the space, stating in *Slate* magazine, 'My job is simply to present what I see in the way I see it'. (2013, para. 5)

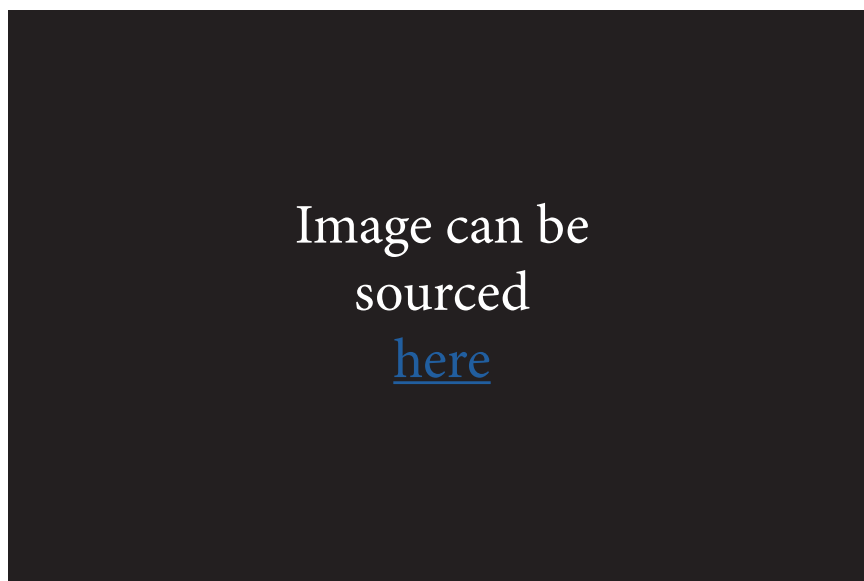


FIGURE 9. [Cromwell House - Image: Christian Pearson/Misheye 2013](#)

It was the unseen here, the unrepresented, that in the end returned, and turned what was regarded as a successful public exhibition on its head – shut down and in damage control. The vagueness surrounding the closure of this site, the police raid, was revealed by an ex-worker who visited the exhibition to be actually a forced eviction that left workers from Cromwell Manor locked out and unable to retrieve their personal belongings. What Christian Pearson captured through his lens held a disconnect. Once this community of previous occupants came forward, they revealed a grave misappropriation of these belongings and of the history of this site. It's hard to say if there could have been appropriate permissions obtained here. Ethics panels for a major institution and a social enterprise didn't foresee this, but at the very least the instigation of a collaborative engagement, a conversation with the workers here could have averted much of the pain this community suffered, and quite possibly could have led to a greater outcome for this site.

In bringing this example forward, my aim is not to position myself on some righteous platform. I know how hard it is to obtain permission information. Through the Owl Barn negotiations, I was asked by family members to remove the word 'abandoned' from social posts, as it alluded to the site being uncared for. Cromwell House, like many of the sites I've worked with, have no heritage overlay. They sit under the radar, mixed in amongst the hundreds of sites that are demolished or renovated every week. They are part of a greater palimpsest that has seen a transformation from the traditional lands and home of the Wurundjeri (Melbourne), Wilyakali and Barkandgi (Broken Hill) – land never ceded – to what we see and experience before us today. These sites that appear to be without care, 'abandoned' even, with the determined demolition notice, still have the capacity to hold history and connections that may only be realised through time spent with site.

When I think back to the visit to the Owl Barn site with the owner present, there were rewards on many levels. There was the reintroduction to the neighbour with the owner granting my permission to be at his site. There was also the realisation that Mitch hadn't been back to the site since he was encouraged to leave to the home. However, the most powerful moment was standing in the site with Mitch and feeling the energy; seeing the hands of the man who had placed every object in this space that I'd initially deemed abandoned. It's a word that now sits uncomfortably: to be without care.



FIGURE 10. The Owl Barn - Return to site - Mitch Wilmont - The Owl Man, 2018

PRIVATE

DOE
KEEP
OUT

Approaching site - resolve

Engaging a strategy of how to approach a site is a way to contend with the unease of the unknown. The act of approaching a site suggests an active set of negotiations that take place as I move forward rather than negotiation being in retrospect. Ultimately, how does this help me navigate my concerns of constraints, trespass and obtaining permissions? With Belfield as I stood at the boundary – considering what has already occurred, what is occurring and what potential lies ahead – the pause here was important. In this pause the site then has the chance to respond and reveal qualities of its resistance. I discovered that a boundary has increments of resistance that are measured through the response that occurs. In the case of *Manorism*, this was a resistance that came quite late in the process. In considering the concerns of the community here, the negotiation of permissions may have allowed greater inclusiveness within and ownership of the exhibition. However, discerning the unknowns when approaching a site, particularly when much of the knowledge may be undocumented, sets challenges. The acknowledgement of the potentiality of these boundaries and thresholds engages our awareness. So, when a site bites back, as the Owl Barn did, thresholds are challenged. It is critical then to understand that this is the site equalising our assertiveness. These are the conditions of the site. There is a need to hold a degree of uncertainty here. Just enough hesitation, a pause to allow the implications of my actions to be thought through and negotiated with every step. The follow-through with the Owl Barn negotiations, opened up a rich connection to this site's history, and the capacity for the family to be part of how I engaged with the space and celebrated the outcomes.





FIGURE 13. Interior Windsor, 2017

Part II

WITHIN SITE

It is interesting to consider the term abandonment as less about being uninhabited and more as uninhibited; free, wild, reckless, unrestrained, unruly, unbridled, impulsive, impetuous. This is far more enticing to a creative response than terms like rejected, dumped or forsaken. The relationship we have to a site as owner/occupier/caretaker/landlord sets up this potential fall from grace when care is removed and a site is left to fend for itself. The only reason under these terms for plaster to cling to frames, render to walls and floors to hold a degree of stability is in how they serve our needs, or at least our domestic needs. But if abandonment can mean the freeing of these constraints then the terms of engagement within these structures can be redefined. **Part II: *Within site***, transitions past the boundaries and thresholds this research explored in *Approaching site*, to consider new boundaries and thresholds within site. Lines fluctuate here between knowing and unknowing. I reveal how I move through a site with instincts heightened, questioning the competency and the capacity for these environments to feed creative outcomes.



FIGURE 14. Interior Windsor, 2017

Chapter 4: What matters

Placing syringes in methadone bottles, there is a strange melding of one vice with another. Mattresses in every room, piles of clothes, a bag of faeces in a corner. There is an existence here on an edge. Ready to run, to move with the slightest warning. I don't want to clear the space immediately. I want this material, this information to guide what and how I work with the space. There seems to be a chance here to encounter energies and fleeting moments that can easily shift, be disrupted or dissipate like the unsettling of dust.

Belfield — 3-5-2016

On first entry to the Belfield site, you would think that the disorderly state it was in would evoke a sense of unease. An unsettled array of objects that felt like it was in some kind of holding pattern – in wait for its owner to return so that their existence and purpose could be justified. Instead it was quite the opposite with everything feeling as though its final resting place was just that, final. There seemed to be a completeness to this picture. A still life, frozen in time. It was as if after the last body left the site, something changed and the site entered a new phase. One that didn't require the activity of human occupation to warrant its existence. I was concerned in this moment to how much my physical presence felt disruptive to the site. I understood how quickly I could shift, change and control the disorder I was experiencing. Did my intervention in this site begin as soon as I passed over the initial threshold?

My preparation from here was important, to be equipped to experience a site and understand that within moments, like the unsettling of dust, my ability to unsettle this site, and potentially lose important information was a concern. In philosopher Henri Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis* (2004, 30) he asks us not to 'jump from the inside to the outside of observed bodies'. We should, 'come listen to them as a whole'. This is what the site asked of me at this point; a slowness and attentiveness to its wholeness.

Even in the chaotic arrangement of objects strewn throughout the house, everything felt like pieces of some sort of puzzle. Evidence that when deciphered would reveal a story, a message or maybe just a feeling. Lefebvre reflects on the live experience of observing the everyday, stating, 'no camera, no image or series of images can show these rhythms. It requires equally attentive eyes and ears, a head and a memory and a heart.' (2004, 45) There is a kind of absorption happening in this moment, as I walk through the site, with my body flicking between sensors of sight, smell, feel. Each activates the other, drawing linkages and attempting to dispel quick thought and resolved answers.

In *Approaching site* I contended with boundaries and thresholds. Within this site there are new considerations of boundaries and thresholds as each object, through my awareness, finds its own solitude against another. In isolation we can determine how each and everything relates to another. In his book *Form and object: A treatise on things*, French philosopher Tristan Garcia (2014, 55) states, 'solitude makes the thing'. We inevitably employ value here, as we discern what matters, strikes our attention; and what doesn't matter, what goes unnoticed. Garcia writes, 'in the world of importance, everything is comparable to itself and to other things.... from the more to the less; they expand and contract – they are elastic and comparable with each other.' (2014, 31)



FIGURE 15. Interior design book and methadone bottle, 2016

Positioning this thinking within site, I contemplated the relationship between each thought I have: thought to experience, experience to object and vice versa. There was the potential in this freeness to explore the ambiguity of everything that I stood amongst. These things strewn throughout a thing in a world of things. The exclusivity of the two positions, the before and after, the knowing and unknowing, is questioned here. This is not linear but is fluctuating, sitting between knowing and unknowing. It's what Massumi refers to as 'conjunctive relation' (2013, 4) the before and after of a threshold passed mutually include each other in the same event, as 'pulses of the same change'.

I am forced to redefine my relationship to my surrounds, breaking down hierarchical structures and putting myself amongst the site rather than just within it. Even here, the body, a centralised figure to which everything is placed in accordance, is argued. As Garcia (2014, 54) states, 'since a human being is among other material things, a human being is one material thing'. My body is a thing amongst things. I inevitably find myself filtering through a vast field of interrelations and things distilled to what matters, inevitably accumulating a pool of the inverse: what doesn't matter. Possibly there is a comparison here to the greater awareness felt when first experiencing composer John Cage's three movement composition of silence in 4'33" (Gann, 2010). In the Belfield site everything was distilled down to not just minutes and seconds and layers of sonics but also millimetres and micrometres.

It's here that I find the research settling into a point that echoes through every thought and action that is to be experienced. My hesitation at approaching site revealed there are things that matter; things I want to matter, and things I possibly haven't determined as yet that should matter. Here within site, there are equal considerations as the subtleties and quieter histories may only appear through careful consideration. If my intervention at this point was just standing in a site, then it was a necessary action to allow the site the capacity to intervene with me.



FIGURE 16. Ants crossing floorboards prior to storm, Belfield, 2016



FIGURE 17. Interior Windsor, powdered render, rotten floor, 2017

Chapter 5: Capricious

From the outside, the Windsor site appears as a modest brick semi-detached, but within it is far from this. Utilised as a make-do engineering workshop for the Nuttelex Oil factory (next door), the interior space is more of a fusing of the industrial and the memory of a distant domestic past. The space is confronting with a visceral feeling as it appears to be rotting before my eyes. There is a strong odour of old oil and lard. It is at times verging on repulsive. There is a familiar feeling of worry that this site is too far gone. There seems nothing here to indicate it is going to be conducive to creative potential, or at least supplying a certain level of comfort needed to work in this environment.

Windsor — 8-9-2017

“There is nothing that happens in an artist’s life – whether good or bad, no matter how dramatically important or apparently trivial – that cannot be turned to effective use in their art. Artists are unusually vulnerable to the world in this way. And they, in turn, use their work to seduce others into valuing what they do.”

Michael Craig-Martin, On being an artist
(2013, 13)

The first entry to an abandoned site is the most crucial time to experience it. It has an aliveness, not liveness, a relational quality of life. There are signs and ciphers that belong to past human occupation, which in the status change – pre-demolition or other – are freed up to be reconsidered. Past the entry threshold, everything can be something else. It’s what Russian theorist, Victor Shkovsky (1917, 2) referred to as making objects unfamiliar, to ‘increase the difficulty and length of perception.... to make forms difficult’. There is an immediacy in this moment, as if this transition or transformation for me is happening in real time. These ‘things’ become unfastened from my consciousness, not disconnected: they still hold a relationship to me. Tethered to me. Just holding. In a state of tension. There is elasticity here.

Whilst it appeared aged, the Windsor site from the outside didn’t really give a sense of the internal decay. It was a confronting experience, walking through for the first time. There was uncertainty there, as the history of this space in all its visual rawness was evident everywhere I looked. There was elasticity in the relationship between knowing and unknowing, as I struggle to hold on to what was familiar. To walk a surface as I would in our everyday movement – the floors had rotten through in areas – the site asked for another approach. ‘Capricious’ is how Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky’s (Stalker, 1979) lead character in *Stalker* describes this uncertainty in a site. As the stalker leads the journey through the post-apocalyptic wastelands, The Zone, he warns us that, ‘Old traps disappear and new ones emerge.... safe spots become impassable’. Within the site there was a sense that every thing around me was becoming less fixed and more as poet Craig Dworkin (2013, 123) describes in his book *No Medium* as ‘Tactics’ that were less warnings and more suggestive propositions for new ways of inhabiting the site.

Photomedia artist Alison Bennett (2009, 16) explores this encounter of a space, stating, ‘I am interested in the shudder one experiences when encountering a room.... where past, present and future collapse.... the collapse between what it feels like inside this room and what it feels like inside my head’. For Bennett, ‘interiority’ involves the body as part of the space, eradication of distance, of separations and so there is a flow between walls and the surface of the skin. Touch becomes a certain activator where, as she states, ‘Interiority shifts from spatial incarnation to tactile and sensual, a point of contact, the collapse of the space between.’ (Bennett, 2009, 70)

There is a prompt to involve the whole body here. To consider an expanded understanding of the role my senses play in connecting to this inner world. In his book *The Eyes of the Skin*, Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa, elevates the skin as the central sensual membrane that involves all our senses. This layer that covers our eyes, ears, our whole body is the transponder that receives signals for our minds to decipher. Our bias towards sight as the primary go-to for observation is questioned by Pallasmaa (2005,10), as he states, ‘All senses are specialisations of skin tissue and all sensory experiences are modes of touching and thus related to tactility’. Ultimately, what Pallasmaa’s thinking prompts is that our experience of the body and the body’s full sensory experience need greater consideration. What am I paying attention to? How narrow is this band of perception? Can I activate a greater peripheral awareness? These are the questions I’m asking as I attempt to involve myself at a deeper sensual awareness of a space.

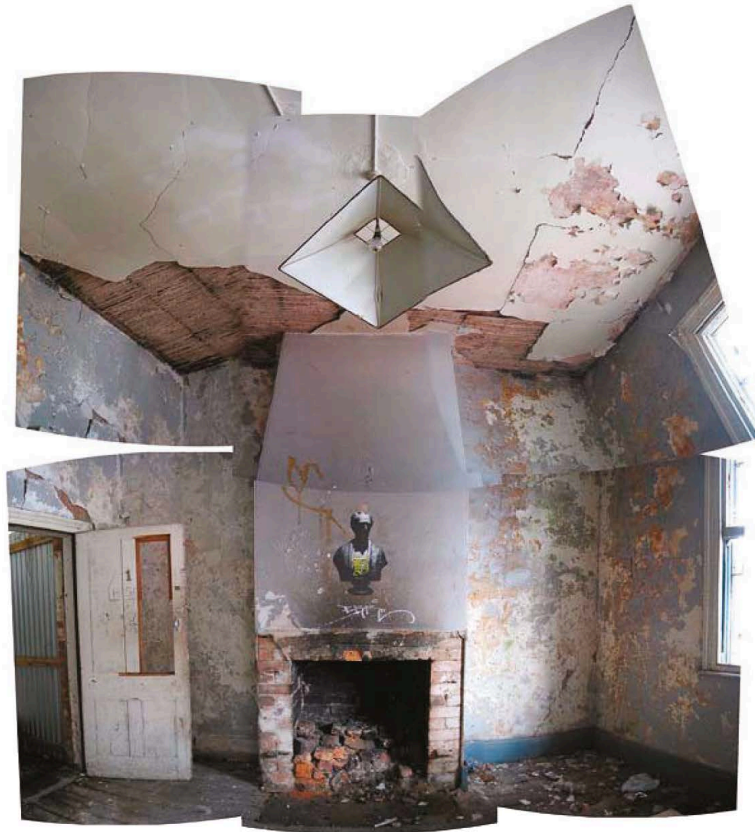


FIGURE 18. Alison Bennett, *In Ruins #15*, [stitched digital photograph](#), 2005



FIGURE 19. Alison Bennett, *3D Capture, Belfield*, 2016

Returning briefly to Belfield, I had the privilege of exploring the site with Dr Bennett utilising 3D photographic technology. Capturing the space through this process created the most remarkable effect of converting the interior surfaces into a skin-like hollow form. As you move through the model, you can pass through the wall surface revealing the interior and exterior as one. There is something in this moment where the solidness of this form, the house, that seemed so resilient, is actually revealed as a fabric that can be shed – like skin.

The surfaces of our built structures are skin-like. In their thinness, like the 3mm of glass, they are remarkably resilient, supplying us with a fair degree of protection. In *The poetics of space*, French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1969, 51) considers them our ‘a coat of armour’. They hold warmth – a red-brick wall after being bathed in sunlight - perspires with moisture; and in their emptiness, they are cool as if our bodies’ presence in these spaces is what is essential for an evenness in temperature. They are the epidermis of the house, and like the thin layer of an eyelid have the capacity to obscure the brightest of lights and hold at bay the harshest of winds. Through the 3D photographic translation, the ideas I am exploring here, of a site’s ability to be changeable and hold qualities like the body are supported. Even the carpet, which appeared to be the only thing holding my weight when all below had rotten away, had this skin-like quality.

There is no easy way to explain the feeling of being in such a site as Windsor. It felt disruptive to the site on entry, but also to myself. All my senses were heightened: less due to uncertainty of another occupant, and more to the visceral quality of the site. It took time to re-attune my response to the site, from uncertainty about its potential due to its rotting state to a realisation that I was feeling this site, through my senses more than any other site I had experienced. It asked for a different approach. A slowness and consciousness in how I moved within, and what I ask of it. With time the unease here subsides and there was a sense of greater warmth. It was as if time in the space settled initial concerns, allowing I and it, to warm to each other. Two bodies.





Chapter 6: Everything placed has its purpose

The smell of stale oil
Dust is always present
What I'm introducing
To being introduced
I introduced a wardrobe to a room
The smell is so strong, domestic, home
It's gone now, not the wardrobe, the smell (fragrance)
I introduce lines or possibly define lines
They are now everywhere I look
Light
Lines are turning now into runs or channels
That liquid can flow through
With what remains
Everything placed has its purpose

Windsor, 2017



FIGURE 22. Roof space, Spotswood, 2017

Chapter 7: Access(ion)

I'm sitting in the roof space in the Spotswood house. When climbing up through the small access point in the room, you realise how barely accessible this space is. It is strikingly different up here, wondrous and otherworldly. Here we have a space that holds a degree of emptiness even when the house may be occupied. The main frame of the rafters is almost a perfect pyramid form with no central uprights. Clear space with a sea of wool insulation giving it a surreal snowlike quality. Light streams diagonally through small holes in the corrugated tin, picking up dust particles and resting on the insulation. Even the sound is subdued. Reflections are unable to find their repeat against the absorption of one surface. The space has warmth. Insulation that appears like a combined felt and fat work by Joseph Beuys, and heat transferred through the thin layer of corrugated tin combine to create a level of comfort that an enclosed space, for me at least, encourages.

Spotswood – 16-1-2017

In the moment when I climbed up and sat in the roof space of the Spotswood site, the passing of time became incredibly evident. The Windsor site revealed this through its disintegration, evident in the render dust gathered at the bottom of walls like snow-peaked mountains. The Spotswood roof space revealed time in action. The pinhole light streaming through the roof space revealed a slowing of time, as I experience the dust in a state of suspension. Once unsettled, it takes time for dust to settle. Philosopher Michael Marder in his book *Dust* (2016, 8) writes, 'Dust crosses the boundaries between the living and the dead, plant and animal matter, the inside and the outside.... Dust is the new-old and the old new, a zone of death and birth.' There is something in this moment that feels otherworldly, but I had to remind myself that this is of this world.

As I sat in the darkness, eyes adjusting to the light, I realised my sense of distance and of place had shifted so significantly on entry. This was as close as I could get to something like Bachelard's consideration of the 'attic'. In *The poetics of space* (1964, 16) he writes, 'up near the roof all our thoughts are clear'. It was a kind of clarity, like looking out into a moonless clear sky at night, allowing a kind of readjusting of my perception and perspective. In an interview, writer Robert Darr (2013, 01:18) discusses the ways in which we can encourage greater distance of perception. He states, the 'uniformity of the ocean encourages the observation of subtleties.... it erases the memory of the land.'

The uniformity that Darr talks about was evident in this moment. The space beneath and its memory wasn't quite erased but certainly sat at enough distance to allow a disconnect to inspire other ways of observing. Darr talks about the idea of play or playing, meaning to be 'properly engaged in seeing', with our senses alive 'we are apertures for seeing' (Darr, 2013, 01:25).

After I returned to the main space of the house, there was a greater sense of awareness of the subtleties. I began to consider other ways of accessing the spaces that reside beyond the surface – without cutting through. This led me to explore a work, *Sensing the wall*. This work brought me closer to the surface of the space allowing me access beyond its surface. Using contact microphones placed at each end of the wall I could suddenly hear the sounds outside of this space amplified through its surface. As sound artist Toshiya Tsunoda states, 'any particular place forms a pattern of vibrations that is specific to the place depending on the physical condition of the space' (Tsunoda, *erstwords*, 2009). The vibrations amplified through this surface revealed textures of the outside world. Trains passing, muffled conversations, wind and cars. Tsunoda talks about seeking a specific point for recording searching for 'the nature of the place', stating 'there are various movements of waves such as resonance, interference and overtone happening everywhere.'

In listening intently to the vibrations, attempting to discern the different textures of sound, I went through a process of caressing the wall with my hand. With only the subtlest of touch I could hear the high-pitched silkiness of my skin on the surface, balanced with the subtleties of the walls surface texture. This brought my body into play again. Here we have Pallasmaa's elevation of the skin as the dominant sensual experience (Pallasmaa, 2005). Pressing my weight against the wall I could feel the tension of the surface and hear cracking of the plaster, revealing more of a molecular composition rather than the solid completeness if experienced just by sight. I could feel the studs as if they were bones – once again the body here. It is a reminder of how we are attuned to a certain way of engaging in these spaces. Possibly even warned not to touch surfaces or lean or press. Darr's 'properly engaging' could be extended to consider how we feel a space and perform it (Darr, 2013).



FIGURE 23. *Sensing the wall*, Stereo Mic, contact mics, recording of the touch of its surface, Spotswood, 2017

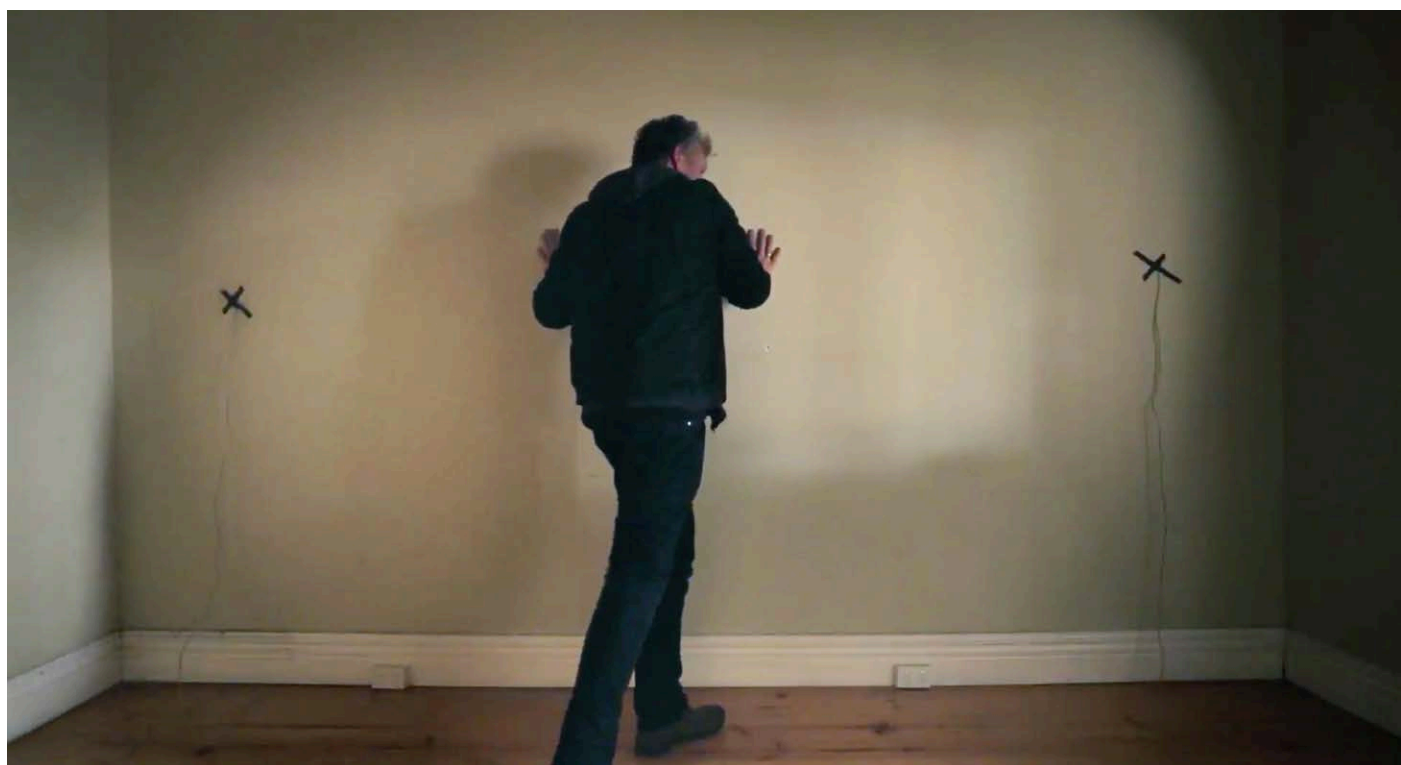


FIGURE 24. *Sensing the wall* - Stereo Mic, contact mics, recording of the touch of its surface, Spotswood, 2017



FIGURE 25. Robbie Rowlands, camera obscura, Windsor, 2017

Chapter 8: Light(ness)

The radio I leave on overnight has a talk-back show in a foreign language - it's still set on the same station as found. It's a pleasant welcoming, a kind of liveness to a site that was initially so subdued and forgotten. I'm now in the living room, it's dark, with some light filtering through the small back window and kitchen door, but I'm keen to see if I can supply some more light to the room. I decide to knock out the plaster wall-vent at the top of the wall facing the east of the room. It's only a small rectangular vent that most old places have, but I can see some light coming through, which may help brighten the room. I set my ladder up and ascend with a hammer. It breaks away with ease and I'm able to push through to clear an opening. I turn to experience whether this effort was successful and almost fall off the ladder with the spectacle before me. From corner to corner, floor to ceiling, a camera obscura covers the whole wall. A wash of brilliant blue with details of the red-brown brick warehouse that sits behind this property - all inverted of course. It is stunning and hard to comprehend that light can work in this way. Even though I know the basics of physics, here it is wondrous and unexplainable. I sit and watch, knowing this is not a static image, in the hope I can discern movement.

Windsor – 1-10-2017

Within a site I often use light as a way to guide my approach or at least as a way to adjust my gaze. I often stay through the afternoon to the dark of night to see if there is a particular moment within this transition that highlights something unseen, unnoticed. In his book *Twilight memories*, Author Andreas Huyssen (1995, 11) describes this period of transition, twilight, as ‘that moment of the day that foreshadows the night of forgetting.... It is memory’s privileged time’.

Light has an incredible ability to enter a space. Finding gaps in cracks or filtering through dusted panes of glass or blinds, curtains etc. Light finds a way in as if it is continually searching for accessibility, as if it has a role to play in being present wherever it can be present. Artist James Turrell (Art21, 2013, 00:42) talks about ‘valuing light’, as we value gold or silver. He prompts us to understand the qualities of what and how light reveals to us new ways of understanding our experience of the world. Rather than receivers, passive in the engagement, we are makers and collaborators in this experience.

Light knows when we are looking, suggests Turrell in an interview with journalist Charlie Rose (Rose, 2013, 20:45). He states, light ‘has different behaviour through a diffraction grading when we’re looking and when we are not.... that almost imbues it with consciousness’. This wonderful notion that light has the capacity to engage or gaze, to entertain or be aware, causes me to reconsider many moments I have experienced wondrous light. An example of this is late one afternoon at the Belfield site. Appearing on the wall of one of the eastern rooms was a subtle light moment that settled just above a wall-cut gesture’s final resting point. It strikes me that the sun was setting on the other side of the house, making this light’s trajectory into the site impossible. My formal reasoning was that the light was bouncing off a neighbour’s window, but – refraining from rational answers – this moment of light was there for me: responding to my attentiveness.

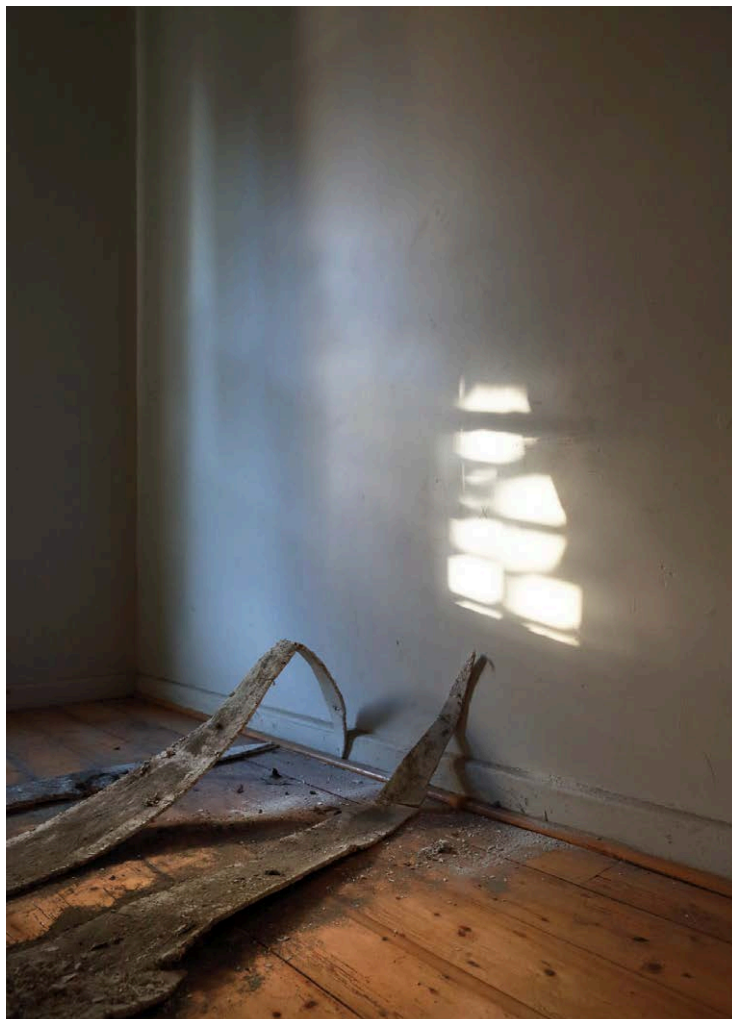


FIGURE 26. Light at end of day, Belfield, 2016



FIGURE 27. Camera Obscura, Windsor, 2017

There is a consideration here that rather than observing a moment such as this twilight light wonder, I was being observed. In the book *The Object Stares Back*, Art historian James Elkins (1996, 51) suggests we are not the only observers, and that at any one moment the observed may be observing us. He states, 'to see is to be seen.... everything I see is like an eye, collecting my gaze, blinking, staring, focusing and reflecting, sending my look back to me.' Here the site shifts from the observed to the observer. Reacting to my movements, my 'gaze', responding to my involvement, my interest. Perception then becomes a two-way experience.

On creating/discovering the camera obscura at Windsor I realise the capacity for site, the room, to act, as Elkins suggests, like an eye. The air-vent, a cornea; and the back wall, a retina. In this moment I am not only experiencing the concept of the eye, but standing within one. Here light's consciousness imparts an active engagement. I stood looking, waiting for movement to prove its activeness and possibly it was holding my attention by only supplying this in the subtlest ways.

The considerations of how light is active in a site, inspires me to re-evaluate moments that held similar experiences. Through Turrell's reasoning, these moments are less of a chance occurrence and more a conscious guiding. A welcoming to communicate. Understanding from this point the importance of how I can articulate a work in a site led by moments of wondrous light or welcome the celebration of light as it highlights changes I've made as if granting some kind of approval.

Within site: resolve

As I crossed the threshold that was defined in *Approaching Site* to consider new boundaries and thresholds within site, observation practice became key. Extending my awareness whilst retaining the pace and even hesitation that I felt before entering was an aim. Slowing time through noticing. In the flux between knowing and unknowing I strived to find equality of all that surrounded me and of what matters, paying particular attention to what I deemed not to matter. The unaccountable changes in mood of a site brought awareness of how my body could be better attuned to its sensations. The site as a body and my body in a site became a consideration here, as the separation blurred with greater attunement. This highlighted the complexities of all things relating to each other (Kaye, 2002). This encouraged a process of touch and feel, and smell as primary senses to avoid the bias towards sight. Accessing the Spotswood roof space revealed how this other space can be otherworldly, helping activate a greater awareness of how I could continue to observe in this way. From this darkness and shallow visibility, light became key to discovering wondrous outcomes within site, which in-turn realised the site's own agency in terms of observation.



FIGURE 29. Light under stage curtain, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018

Part III

THE CUT

In film or sound production, the cut is the edit that breaks a narrative. The cut creates a moment to which a new direction or composition can be explored. It is an action that allows us to remove the excess and define what we require. It is omnipresent any time we are attempting to determine what is necessary and what is not. However, like the moment of hesitation I experience when entering a site, there is hesitation in this action too. Particularly when it involves a destructive action that seemingly cannot be reversed. The cut has a degree of uncertainty to what implications it will have once it has occurred. **Part III: *The cut***, forms the last movement of this dissertation. Suggesting a much anticipated action that would see the introduction of sculptural methods traditionally employed in my practice, here the cut becomes something else. Through perceiving changes in a site this movement encapsulates rich discoveries of how the cut can be considered in broader terms than saw to surface. Even with this action employed in site, the cut pauses in the moment to consider the meaning that is held in this moment. It is here that I consider the importance of what remains, what falls away, and the line that is situated between these two positions.



FIGURE 30. Backstage, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018

Chapter 9: Cut of light

The hall's blue velvet curtains have enticed me back. This time I'm sitting on the stage with the curtain closed. With the curtains closed there is a divide between the performance space and the audience space. This is highlighted by the stark contrast in light. At the bottom edge of the curtains, the point at which they almost touch the stage, there is a sharp line of light that follows the cut of hem. (A cut of light produced by the cut of the curtain.) There is a subtle movement of the folds of the fabric that disrupts the line – appearing like a sine wave that is mapping the rhythm of the space. Once again, the body as motif is in play here and I'm encouraged again to consider the liveness of this abandoned space. This hall breathes.

Broadmeadows Town Hall — 20-12-16

Considering light as the cut in the relationship between the curtain and the stage was a significant challenge to my understanding of how this term can be interpreted in my practice. A saw to a surface is a common conclusion to how the cut could be understood in a process of intervening in a site. In this instance, I am presented a chance to consider the greater dimensions of the term 'cut' in this research. The cut here, as an action, can be one of perceiving change; perception as a cut. Here I consider how distinct changes in the environment reveal clear delineation, a cut between the knowing and unknowing.

Through Part II of this research, *Within site*, I explored how I can unknow what I am seeing. This act of noticing revealed the capacity for the site to be reread. To dislodge and even disrupt the narrative that is in play, purely through observation. Philosopher Paul Virilio in *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* (1991, 11) considers perception as containing 'breaks, absences, dislocations'. He states it has the 'capacity to produce patchworks of various contingent worlds'. Here we begin to see that the cut is capable of existing whenever there is a challenge to perception. As Virilio states, wherever forms of logical or rational thought have dominated, 'vacancies and absences in perception are assimilated and de-singularised into a homogenised and potentially controllable texture of events'.

This ability to control how we perceive a space is highlighted in the work of Turrell's work *Ronin* (1968). The light that permeates the corner gap revealed Turrell's ability to manipulate light differentials to create absences and new forms. Turrell's work while now commonplace in conversations around the use of light in contemporary art, was one of the most influential physical experiences I've had with a site. Walking into a modest New York gallery in the 1990's and testing what appeared to be a very refined projection of light on the wall I had the most overwhelming experience as my hand passed through the surface. The refined but basic intervention of a cut in a surface and what possibly was a set of televisions set out of sight created a profound moment that I have lived with ever since. Turrell's corner strip of light in *Ronin* is closer to what I was experiencing with the cut of light under the curtain. It appears autonomous and almost free-floating in space. Through anchoring perception to this form of light, the space begins to change with time causing it to fall away. The light becomes its own form.

The curtain cut, the thin sliver of light that played out between the curtain and the stage, intervened in my rational reading of these two materials in play. The contrast created by light, similar to Turrell's corner, subtracted my perception of the other spatial qualities. Light became the material that cut into the space and, in turn, my perception. I began to perceive this light as existing in its own space, dislodging its own physicality from the site.

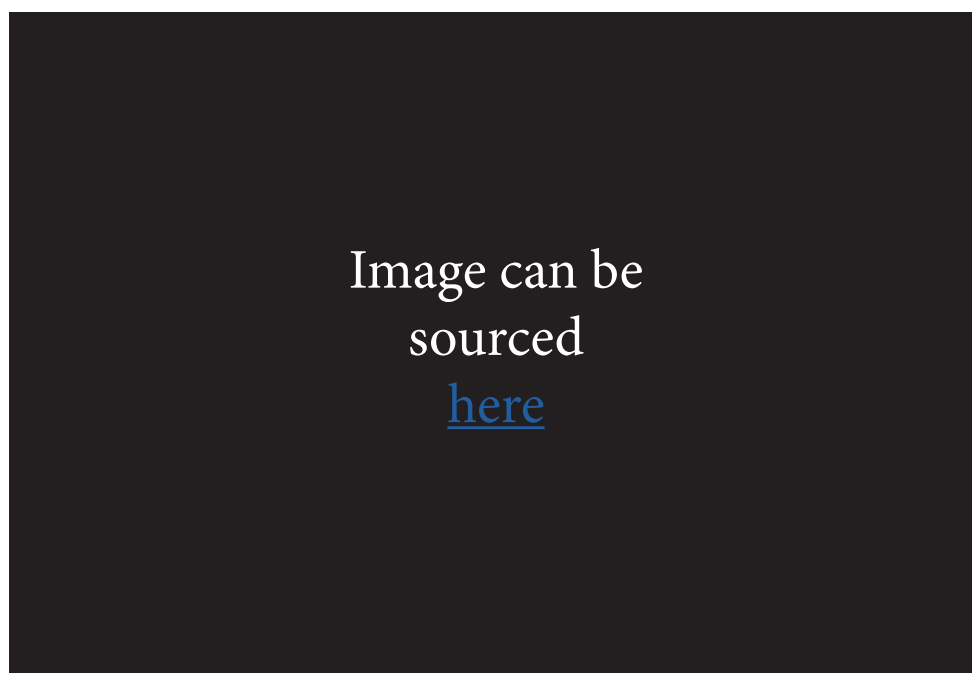


FIGURE 31. James Turrell, *Ronin*, 1968. LED light, dimensions variable.
Collection of the artist James Turrell. Photo: David Heald SRGF

In contrast to Turrell's work, the cut of light formed with the stage and the curtain was not just as a form of light, but in the framing of the folds there was the texture of the stage surface. Rather than a governing light source, what was highlighted appeared as an undulating wooden form. Whilst you lose the definition of the curtain and floor in the blackness, in the cut of light, both existed.

In his emerging years as an artist, sculptor Carl Andre had a realisation that the actual material he was cutting into was in itself a cut. In an interview with art writer David Bourdon (Tompkins, 2011), he states, 'I was cutting into things. Then I realized that the thing I was cutting was the cut. Rather than cut into the material, I now use the material as the cut in space'. Light, in the Broadmeadows Town Hall case, becomes the material and, in turn, the cut. Andre's creosoted wood blocks *Tree Bones* (1974), encourages your eye to follow the taper, extending your perception past the wall and below these lines, through the floor. Andre's work, whilst holding more subtle tonal changes, reveals the cut in how its physical presence in the space dominates the eye, so the space then falls away.

If we return to the cut of light on the stage I see qualities of Andre and Turrell's work. However, the cut here holds its own in how movement comes into play. With the movement of the curtain, mapping the air-currents that subtly move through the hall space, the line continually shifts. Undulating like a sine wave, the form of light has a pulse that was always in motion. The revelation, in this moment, was that whilst the hall had been closed to the public for the past 15 years, it had been consistently active – live. Void of human occupation it was still inhabited, there was still a presence. Here on the stage I was one thing amongst many things, with the hall's inactive, abandoned status capable of being disputed. The hall like Bachelard's house was an 'airy structure that moves about on the breath of time. It really is open to the wind of another time.' (1994, 18)

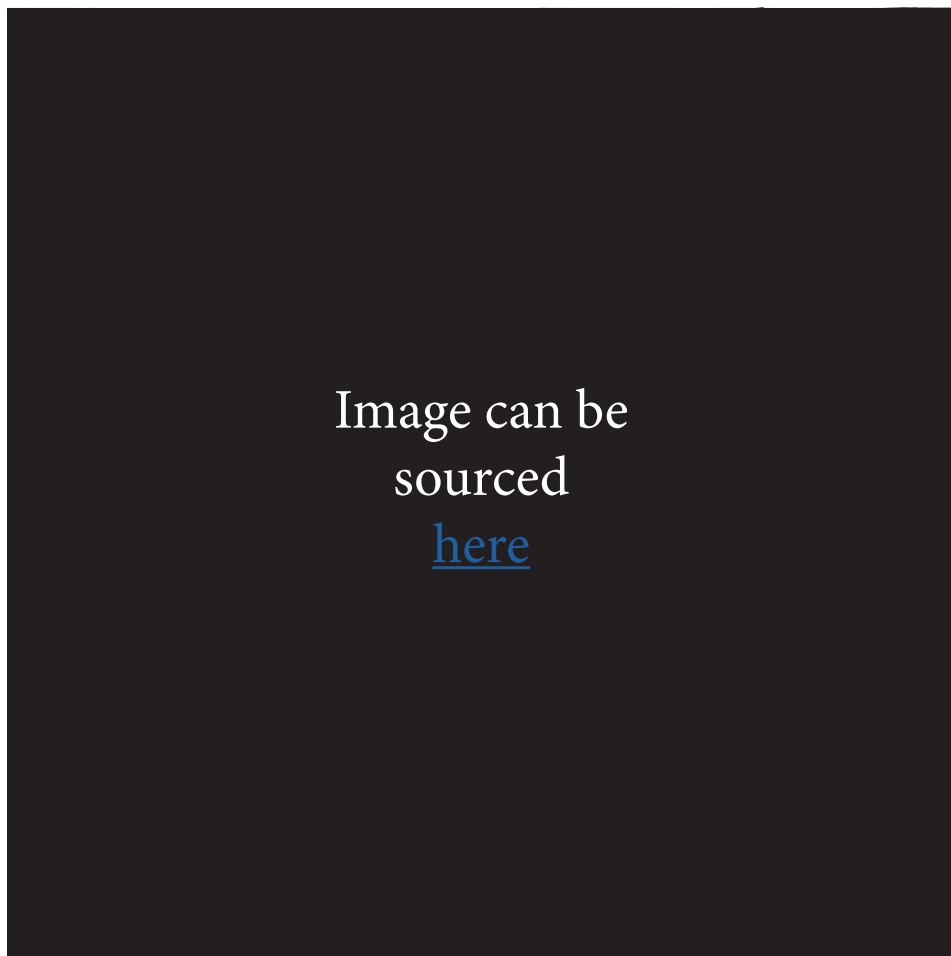


FIGURE 32. Carl Andre, *Tree Bones*, 1974, 198 Creosoted Wood Blocks, 13 Pieces, [Ace Gallery Canada](#), 1974



FIGURE 33. *This Hall Breathes*, Broadmeadows Town Hall, Stage curtain and floor, 2018



FIGURE 34. Initial cut, wall and ceiling, Belfield, 2016

Chapter 10: Held

I begin the day moving through the rooms and marking out large gestures with masking tape. These gestures that reach up the walls and onto the ceilings feel appropriate in scale to what I am experiencing with the site. Everything is still strewn throughout the house. I want it all to remain as long as possible to remind me of what I'm working within. A tension. The first cut with jigsaw through plaster is over quicker than expected. As the dust settles there is a moment in its wake that inspires a pause. The cut reveals an expressive line with ceiling plaster just clinging on, subtly sagging. It is a moment in which I wonder whether to stop and just leave it.

Belfield — 13-6-16

The freshly cut line in the plaster has a resultant effect of easing the tension of a difficult and confronting space. I feel the change in the dynamics of the space as soon as the saw stops. There is the obvious slackening of the initial rigidity of the plaster, as the fibres that hold this surface true are severed. The surface becomes vulnerable and malleable. The line of the cut also holds something in its expression, with broken edges, frayed fibres and dark moments contrasting the stark whiteness of the untouched surfaces. There is something visceral about what I am experiencing here that harnesses the initial tension of the space. This is enhanced by the leaving, momentarily, of the plaster, just clinging on. I realise at this moment that these are expressive cuts and not just cuts as a means to remove part of this surface.

The pause here is necessary to begin to realise what has changed through this action. Certainly, there is a change in the traditional functionality of the space. A cut surface no longer offers the security against external elements, and once compromised it brings up questions of the liveability of this space. This is a narrative shift, but under the terms of pre-demolition this is possibly something that we can consider is already in play? Here I begin to consider the cut as not an end point but a pause, a freeing up of the terms of what narrative can be defined from here.

It's here we start to draw comparisons to how, like a sequence of film, the action of a cut creates a point of consideration in a continuous narrative flow or a point of displacement. In film editor Walter Murch's book, *In the Blink of An Eye* (2001, 6), as a real-time sequence of film is slowed we realise it's actually twenty-four cuts. He writes, this is 'motion within a context rather than twenty-four contexts'. However, Murch also states that if the displacement is great enough, 'we are forced to re-evaluate the new image as a different context'.

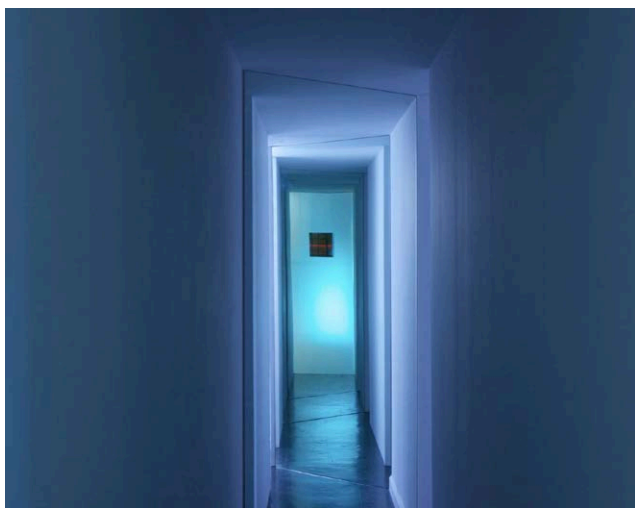


FIGURE 35. Natasha Johns-Messenger, *Threefold*, 2015

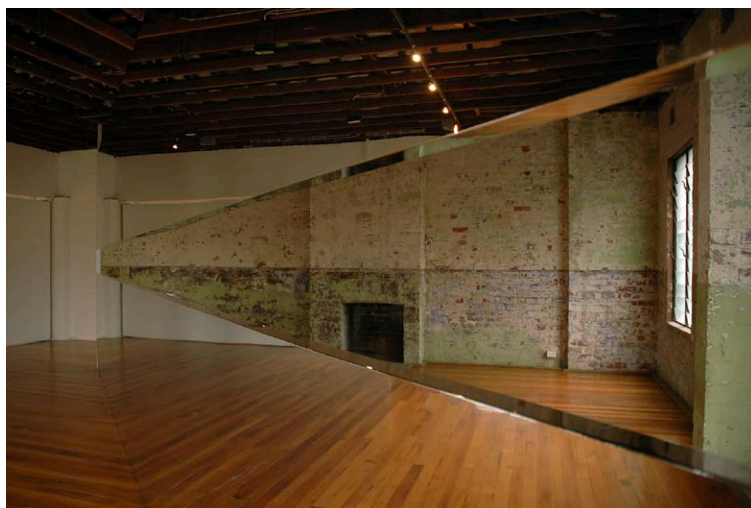


FIGURE 36. Natasha Johns-Messenger and Leslie Eastman, *Pointform*, 2004

Artists Natasha Johns-Messenger and Leslie Eastman created the effect of displacing our perception of a site through the use of mirrors. Two examples of their work that reveals this are *Threefold* (2015) and *Pointform* (2004). These works fracture the space, creating multiple planes and other dimensions. *Threefold* almost appears like Murch's film sequence, as the edge of each mirror in repetition, creates a frame. *Pointform* reveals a strong sense of the cut as it slices through the space. The displacement isn't great enough to lose our bearings. The space in Johns-Messenger's work is cycled back into itself as a kind of feedback. When our body enters its reflection, we become implicated in this image; one within the space.

The distance between the viewer and space defined by *Pointform* reveals an interesting point of difference to how my initial cut in Belfield could be experienced. Similar to this work, my cut was not great enough a displacement to cause a complete re-evaluation of what was being experienced, but rather it's about how the tension was held in the shift. A slight dislodgement, as if we were flickering between two frames within a sequence of change.



FIGURE 37. Cut plaster and fall, Belfield, 2017



FIGURE 38. Plaster fall, Spotswood, 2016

Chapter 11: The Fall

The drip is miraculously landing right on the fitting
Footprints and swish marks of trace of movement
Where there are deliberate cuts there are also breaks
Fresh footprints
Wires cut deliberately
The end gesture has a fall-like quality
Mix of deliberate and accidental
Sense of heavy
The pathos cuts against this
History with all its mess
You can see that there is violence and care
Houses are sacred
Sanctity to houses
The faults allow you to reconcile the feeling of loss
Interstitial

Spotswood, Thinking Through Practice, 2016



FIGURE 39. Cutting the Supper Room floor, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018

Chapter 12: Sharp line and feathered edge

The day of reckoning, the cut, has a strong sense of the ceremony. Cameras rolling, tools tested and ready, and a throng of council members who had asked to be present for the action. The path of the cut marked out; a tapered line crossing the floor diagonally. I start the saw and ease it into the floor. A new blade makes this feel effortless. Slowly, I cut my way along the line, breathing and shuffling, with dust filling the air and sweeping to the sides. It's when the saw stops and the dust begins to settle that the aftermath of the action begins to sink in. The cut, in its physical action of saw through surface, is a conspicuous act bringing attention to all that is being considered here in the supper room of the town hall.

Broadmeadows Town Hall — 11-5-17

Formalities on the day of the cut draw parallels with the hall's past use: ceremonies and events held in this space for over a 60-year period. The ceremonial event here was not just on the surface, the floor, but was about this surface. Artist Gordon Matta-Clark referred to the complexity of unknowing or undoing a site as a process of challenging what he referred to as surface formalism. He stated, 'I never had a sense of the ambiguity of a structure, the ambiguity of place' (Lee, 2001, 102). Architectural writer Eleni Axioti in her article, *The Interruptive Spaces of Gordon Matta-Clark* (2018, 1) suggests the uncertainty Matta-Clark inspires through his many building cuts is his attempt to 'erase any principles or foundations that could rationalize space'. The supper room floor cut feels less about erasing and more about substantiating what is there in the moment.

In the moment of the cut, whilst fluctuating between what is to what follows, fault-lines form in my perception of the site, as they do for the audience. The severity of an action that cuts through appears irreparable and of course disruptive. There is a decisive change for me here and possibly the audience that witnessed the act – almost ceremonial – to how a site transitions into a new unknown at this point. What differentiates this act of saw to material when compared with any other mundane building construction moment?

I've filmed many of my cuts before, removing the sound so that you just get this performative action of a body moving, drawing across a surface. The sound of the saw is so violent. With its removal, the act seems graceful. In the aftermath of the Supper Room floor cut, comments by those that witnessed the cut reflect on how graceful and emotional the action was. Leading into this was the build-up of all the months or possibly years of planning towards the redevelopment. Symbolically, the act of the cut was the ribbon-cutting/cake-cutting moment to determine the beginning of the transformation. I appeared to glide gracefully across the floor. My body moving in one with the saw, dropping each time. The pressure I needed to exert appeared like an act of prayer.

The act of sawing is explored for its richness in preparation and process by anthropologist Tim Ingold in his book *Being Alive* (2011, 53). Ingold describes the simple act of sawing as an action that is akin to other acts of journeying such as walking or rowing. Through the process of measuring up and setting out he writes the act of sawing is 'like going for a walk, sawing a plank has the character of a journey that proceeds from place to place, through a movement that – though rhythmic and repetitive – is never strictly monotonous'. The preparation of the Supper Room floor cut had all the makings of a journey to be had. Marking the line to be traversed, equipment checks and cross checks to make sure everything is in place so that once I've started I can fully concentrate on the task at hand. Ingold (2011, 54) defines the critical moment at the beginning where preparation 'gives way to setting out'.

With the activation of the saw and the first drop of the teeth through the surface, all attention pulled in from my greater peripheral awareness, honing down to the relationship of the sawblade and surface. Ingold (2011, 54) describes the tension in play here, writing, 'in these initial movements – each is like a gasp, a sudden intake of breath, that runs counter to the direction in which the saw is disposed to run, and in which the wood is disposed to receive it. The wood resists, and seems to want to expel the saw by causing it to jump out.'



FIGURE 40 & 41. Gordon Matta-Clark, *Bronx Floor: Floor Hole*, 1972.

Photo: [The Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark/Courtesy of the Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark and David Zwirner, New York/London](#)



FIGURE 42. Cutting the Supper Room floor, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018

My saw was electric and not manual as Ingold is describing, but still the concentration and tension – possibly more due to the power of the saw – was the same. It was less of a ribbon-cutting moment and more, as Ingold has described, a journey across a surface as if I am rowing a boat or striding across a field similar to Richard Long's *Dusty Boots Line Sahara* (1988). At times I realised I wasn't breathing with the motions but holding my breath. I reminded myself to breathe to balance with the tension of the action. Holding the saw with enough strength to prevent sudden jumps but not firm enough to not feel the subtleties of the movement, I could feel the grain and the tension of the opposing actions of the floor. As Ingold (2011, 16) states, objects can 'act back'. The floor had agency here, with opposing forces, resistance, and not a passive receiver of my intentions. It reminded me again that when we press our bodies against these surfaces, they are, in turn, pressing against us.

In the moment of opening up this surface, there is a sense that a dimension greater than perceived of this space is accessible. Artist Doris Salcedo (2008, 25) states, 'History summarizes, sanitizes, and smooths out differences, so that everything appears to have been perfectly synchronized as a unified stance'. Her 2007 Tate Modern floor cut *Shibboleth I* featured a carved line through concrete floor that fractured the Turbine Hall space. Shibboleth means to distinguish one group from another. *Shibboleth I* is, as Salcedo described, about access and who is excluded. For Salcedo, this work was a disruption. The opening up of this unified surface encouraged access to the perspectives of the other – that or those forgotten.

The Supper Room hall cut, like *Shibboleth I*, doesn't necessarily frame one particular cause, group or circumstance in its disruption. The ambiguity here allows the cut to be an opening, an access point; different to that of a door, a window or even small gaps in surfaces. There is no placating the violent act here with an animated gesture of articulated wood as I have considered in past works. Held in this moment, where boards appear freshly stripped back, placed along one edge and sawdust feathering out, the cut reveals modest foundations and older history. In its rawness, the cut, to begin with, severs perceptions of how this space could continue to support the community in the way it has. It no longer could act as a surface of structural support, but now in its undoing, its unknowing, there is a pause to consider what value it still holds now that this relationship has changed. Now, in its undoing, it actually needs structural support and community support for it to exist as something other, something that prevents it from being a waste product of a demolition process.

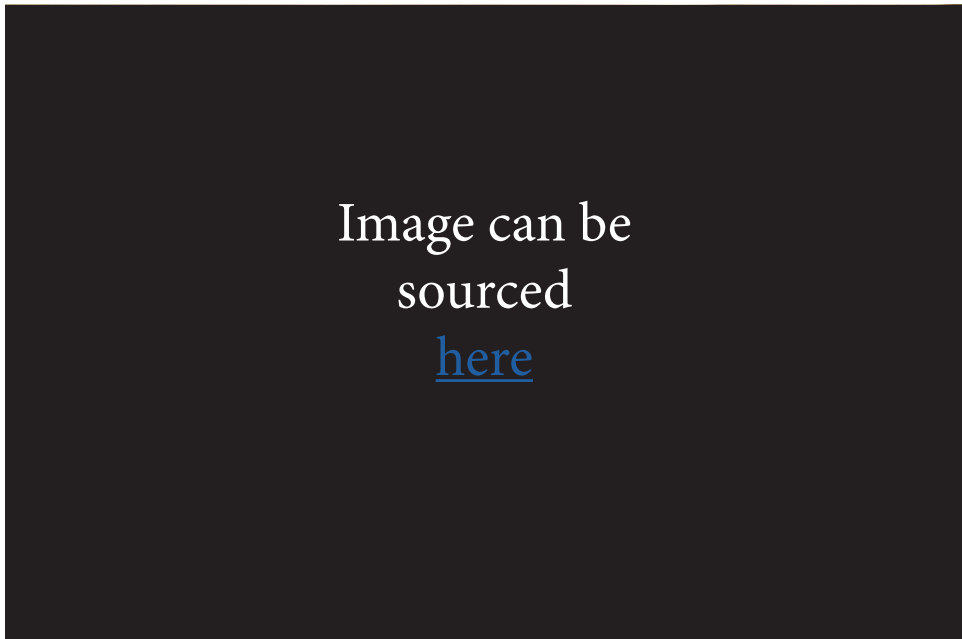


FIGURE 43. Doris Salcedo, *Shibboleth I*, 2007.
Installation view, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London, 2007. [Photo: Sergio Clavijo](#)

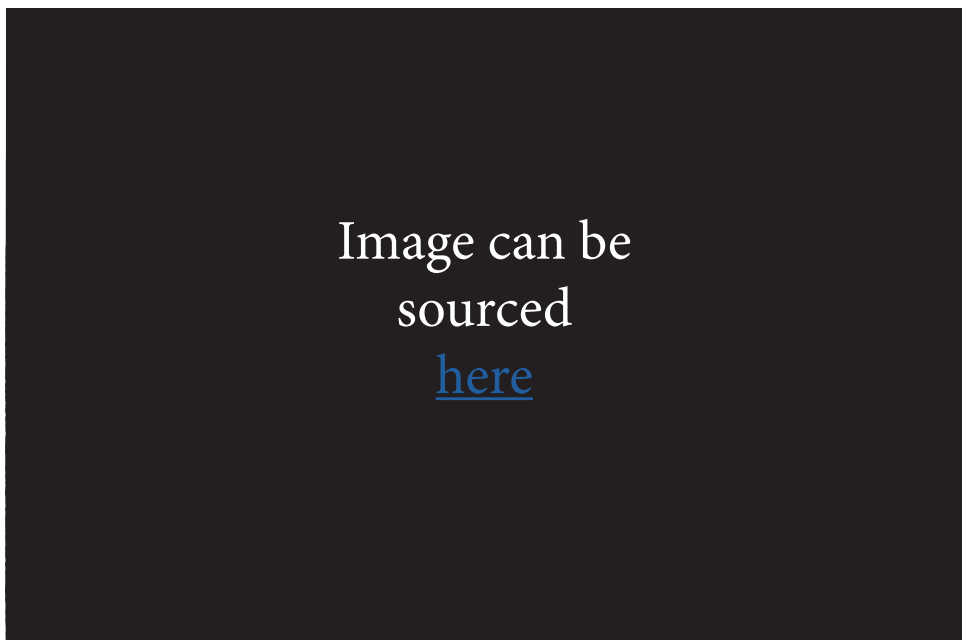


FIGURE 44. Richard Long, *Dusty Boots Line Sahara* 1988. [Photo Richard Long](#)

With the hall's closing many years back, its function had already changed. It stood more as a memorial to these past grand and modest moments. It had no real signs of distress other than being outmoded in design. My time with this site became a rich exploration of how the site could be re-performed through acts of walking the floor, studying surfaces, forms, light and movement. But the single planned act of cutting a line, saw to surface, through the Supper Room floor, was a significant threshold of change to how this hall functioned.

There was talk of muddied streets, which existed in the early days when the hall was first built. It was a brown-brick, double-story building that would have stood in impressive scale against barren landscape. There was a political struggle by the community, uniting diverse groups to protest against the hall becoming a pokies venue. There are many and varied stories of ceremonies, formals, weddings, political events and showroom moments (Ford would exhibit their latest cars in the hall's upper and lower rooms). The capacity of the floor to hold weight was compromised by the cut, so in-turn, its relevance as support to our lives was revealed. The under-surface, revealed by the cut, was encrusted soil, entombed over the life of the hall, and now visible. The very surface that the community poetically referred to in their reference to muddied streets was here preserved, converting the space and this under-surface into a kind of museum, or a window into the past. The title that came to me after a restless night, *Crossing the Floor* took into consideration the social act of crossing the supper room space to greet others. It also considered the political act of uniting all sides against a cause.

Today was possibly one of the hardest community engagements I have ever had. I could feel it in the air, or at least notice it, as members of the community that have been particularly concerned with the building's future walked the space. There was an eagerness to begin the artist talk, and it wasn't necessarily driven by me. If anything, I was looking for exits. Before I knew it, I was seated next to the floor cut with an audience whose eagerness ranged from excitement about my work to those representatives that had come specifically to voice their concern. I held my ground, with respect, as I had done before, but it was hard to keep this resilience when the energy driving these oppositions was steered more towards the greater extent of the building works. I was inevitably caught up in this, and here I was cutting through the very surface of what these various voices stood firm in opinion of keeping. Change was inevitable here in the proposed redevelopment. My project, my cut in this space gave a hint at what was coming. The hall with all its material components was to be rearranged, partially destroyed and architecturally reimaged. If uncertainty wasn't present in this moment, the cut allowed for it and if anything, inspired it. The unknowing here, whilst confronting, revealed that the appreciation of what this space meant for many had to be renegotiated. To consider whether the site in its completeness was the only way we can access history here. Here through my cut I segmented it, placing it in a way that the eye could return each component to its place, thus repairing the surface. However, history here, has a new marker in time. A contemplative moment that brings forth all that has existed before it.

Broadmeadows Town Hall — 4 -6-17



Figure 45. Artist Talk, This Hall Breathes, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2017



The cut - resolve

In a sense there is no resolving a cut. It is an opening, a break in the narrative or set of narratives that are in play. It sets the site and circumstances that surround it at a lively point of questioning, ambiguity and unknowing of what it can be. The resolve is really in what it has stood for and how this at the point of a cut can be experienced. The light beneath the curtain revealed the ability of the action as a term to broaden in interpretation. Whilst still holding a function of defining a point of change, the cut here revealed how through observation, perceptive change could be the cut in the narrative that I was experiencing. The hall in this moment held its existence in the cut of light that was cast through the small gap between the curtain and stage surface. The movement revealed the consistent activeness of the hall disputing its status as inactive. The chapter *Held* brought awareness in this research to moments within the process of a cut that held degrees of tension. The degrees here become like frames in a sequence of film. Each frame is itself a cut (Murch, 2001, 6). Whilst the action of the cut plaster followed through with its complete peeling away, pausing in this moment allowed contemplation of tensions alive in this partial fall, which may be of consideration in future works. 'The Fall' welcomed a much needed free-flowing discussion of a work. The description of pathos here was a crucial reading, as it brought forward how emotion attached to a space and my process can be considered. 'Sharp line and feathered edge' revealed the complexities and rewards of intervening in a space that had such strong and current connections to the community. It positioned my actions in the midst of raw public debate around place and how we reflect, commemorate and retain history.

Conclusion

This practice led research project is situated in the field predominantly defined as site-specific arts practice. Working from Miwon Kwon's (Kwon 2002, 166) prompt to address how artists and institutions work with site, my emphasis moved from being site-specific to one of responsiveness. This allowed me to attend to the conditions of each site and situation, and respond to the dynamic changes that occurred.

At the beginning of this research, whilst my intention was to work with sites undergoing change or complete destruction, there were no sites selected or on offer. Whilst this added a degree of uncertainty to how I moved forward, it opened up a greater opportunity for live response and integrated the research into my practice. In this way, my practice opened up to new possibilities within the model of creative research.

Five sites form the basis of this research - three domestic houses, a town hall and a modest museum set in the central NSW desert. These sites were all incredibly different in all aspects from their technical builds, the communities and social function they served and their locations in the landscape. One key aspect that holds them together is their modest status in terms of how we create hierarchies within our built environment. With the lack of heritage certification and protection, their heritage and importance is less defined in official terms. These modest, utilitarian, outmoded buildings' histories are celebrated by my research in their everyday functionality. Most importantly, this project valued the transitional state of these sites and situations, whether they were under renovation, completely destroyed, or in the case of the Owl Barn museum, undergoing a slow demise over time.

As sites became a consideration, there were initial unknown conditions, varying for each, that needed to be understood and negotiated. My methodology adapted to develop a more complex understanding of the impact of my actions. This began with my approach to a site. Here I explored the boundaries and the resistance each revealed. In each the initial point of entry was a significant threshold, that needed time and attentiveness. The greater concern here was how quickly the tensions of first encountering a site would subside. Concern here was also determining rights and responsibilities when dealing with a site and contending with the sites capacity to bite back when thresholds reveal their resistance. In the situation of The Owl Barn it was the protective neighbour that revealed this threshold. One understanding that came from this experience was that the notion of abandonment was refuted here, as the neighbour's stance revealed a sense of care that was present. Another was that whilst overstepping a boundary or potentially trespassing, an appropriate follow through negotiating access resulted in the rich rewards that came from perseverance. The term regained some capacity to be considered when abandonment referred to my and/or a sites openness to being uninhibited rather than uninhabited.

Once I gained access to a site, there became a whole new set of approaches to how I challenge the status of knowing and unknowing what I was experiencing. In *Within site*, I explored how I could fluctuate these modes of knowing and unknowing to allow a greater degree in what mattered to me, and more importantly what didn't matter. I also contended with my capacity to easily disrupt the site and lose important information within this first reading, revealing that my intervention was in play as soon as I passed over the entry point

The anxiety of missing out on moments was alleviated by slowing down and increasing attentiveness. Through opening up greater ways to observe a site, moving past the bias of the visual, I was able to employ a greater use of senses. This inspired new ways to gather information and explore new creative approaches. One particular outcome from this, *Sensing the wall*, brought my body into contact with the space, revealing how we often avoid these connections. Through close contact microphones I was able to hear the lightness of touch, and through pressure, hear the fibers of the surface react with tension. There was an essential moment here where I realised intervention is two way with the site revealing its equity here in how it challenges my preconceptions of what I was experiencing.

The anticipation of the cut that progressed through this dissertation is realised in Part III: *The cut*. Here instead of supplying the expected saw-to-surface moment that would be predictable, I chose to define it first through the experience of how light was observed. The cut of light was an important way to challenge how this term - 'cut' - can be employed in my practice without necessarily destroying a surface or a form. There was destruction here, but more

in how perception of the site and the materials in play transformed in this moment. The light under the curtain was sculptural in its undulating form and needn't be acted upon or made or cut. This experience indicated a shift from this being support material to actual material.

Once the cut progressed to more physical interventions, there was still a need to slow the pace and experience what changes were occurring. As plaster hung after a fresh cut in a ceiling, barely holding on, there was a realisation that the tension here encapsulated the experience of the site. This became key to how further works of cut plaster were explored. What was later realised through the Town Hall intervention was that this tension could be explored in the outcome of this cut. With it appearing freshly cut, with boards lining the edges set like a timeline and sawdust feathering out, there was certainly a visceral quality to this outcome. For the greater community, this work allowed a pause and recognition of the importance of this space, particularly in how the sculpture would progress to a permanent public art outcome for the hall. However, for some this was a confrontation that exposed the rawness of uncertainty that the loss of the physicality of the space entailed.

Through the research I drew on artists and writers who explore the notion of space. How we value space through tangible structures is explored in the work of sculptor Rachel Whiteread with her seminal work *House*; un-knowing the built environment, is explored in sculptor Gordon Matta-Clark's work; light as having consciousness, was a key discovery by artist James Turrell and completely shifted my perceptions on the experience of light; the fluidity of site in the writings of Nick Kaye; solitude makes the thing in the writings of French philosopher, Tristain Garcia; the shudder of encounter with artist Alison Bennett. I reference an exhibition, *Manourism* which highlights the complexities of working with site. Here the oversight in respecting unwritten permissions of this site rebounded and closed the show. These examples revealed the richness, potential and challenges of working with site.

My methodology in the writing was to find a way to compliment my direct research in sites, with text that retains this energy. Utilising reflective, in the moment, writing as the basis for broader thinking, situate this research within site rather than about site. This encouraged a greater emphasis on the importance of what these, at times momentary, experiences could mean to my broader practice. With the concentration of this dissertation on my progression through working with sites there is the capacity to consider further thinking around the value of my documentation as a trace of this experience. Particularly in the aftermath of the demolition of most of these sites. There is also within this potential to consider the differing qualities of the equipment I used. From the saw to the camera changed the way I observed, created, cut or captured.

In closing, the experience over this period of research has been challenging but ultimately rewarding. My time in these sites taught me to slow down and realise quieter conversations of how I can experience the subject sites. In my attentiveness, whether it is purely watching, listening or intervening, there is an openness that created the capacity to un-know all that seemed so matter of fact. I was encouraged to consider the proximity of things and thoughts to one another (Distances) and what, how and when there are connections (Adjacencies). I have developed a greater understanding of the connection of community to site, and the emotional effect of loss and uncertainty held in this transition. Through the outcomes created with these investigations, whether observational, physical works or through the documentation, I have developed new methods of exploring site. Adjusting my values of what these spaces can offer and potentially re-know underlying stories that may have been cloaked and forgotten. As a maker more than a writer the end point is harder to define but the hope is that like art these words are launching points for thinking rather than closed statements for consideration.



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Documentation



Shadows Fall

Pre-demolition house
Belfield, Victoria

July – September, 2016

Commissioned by Melbourne Comprehensive Eye Surgeons

This was a mid 1900s house on the suburban outskirts of Melbourne, Victoria. The modest weatherboard house was part of two adjacent properties scheduled for demolition as a proposed development for Melbourne Comprehensive Eye Surgeons.

There was uncertainty in the abandoned status of this site, as departure of previous occupants who had continued to squat at the house was unknown. This set an initially heightened awareness of site conditions. Structurally the house was competent, but the remnant belongings and the uncertainty of whether the squatters had left created particular tensions around this site.

The final exhibition was a collaborative outcome with artist James Carey who utilised the adjacent property. This was exhibited under the title *Sighting*.



FIGURE 49. Plaster cut, Belfield, Working Shot, 2016



FIGURE 50. *Shadows Fall*, Plaster cut, Belfield, 2016





FIGURE 52. Plaster cut, Belfield, Working shot, 2016



FIGURE 53. *Three ways out*, Belfield, 2016



FIGURE 54. *Divided in two*, Belfield, 2016



FIGURE 55. *Matter of waste*, Belfield, 2016





FIGURE 57. *From corner to corner*, Belfield, 2016



FIGURE 58. *From corner to corner*, Belfield, 2016



FIGURE 59. *Missing*, Belfield, 2016



Light through half drawn blind

Pre-demolition house - Master Bedroom
Spotswood, Victoria

September – October 2016

Commissioned by Hobsons Bay Council and Phillip Adams

This site was a recently vacated house in Spotswood, Victoria. Originally an early to mid 1900s workers cottage, the site was possibly one of the most liveable of many of the sites I have worked with - it still had an active Wi-Fi connection.

After working through the site with observational methods, photography and sound recording I settled on a sculptural intervention in the master bedroom and a performance that captured the experience of touching the wall surface.

Created as part of a group show titled *Between two homes* with collaborative artists, Ash Keating, James Carey, Lilian Steiner, Philip Adams, Matthew Bird and Edition Office.



FIGURE 61. Paster cut, Spotswood, Working shot, 2017



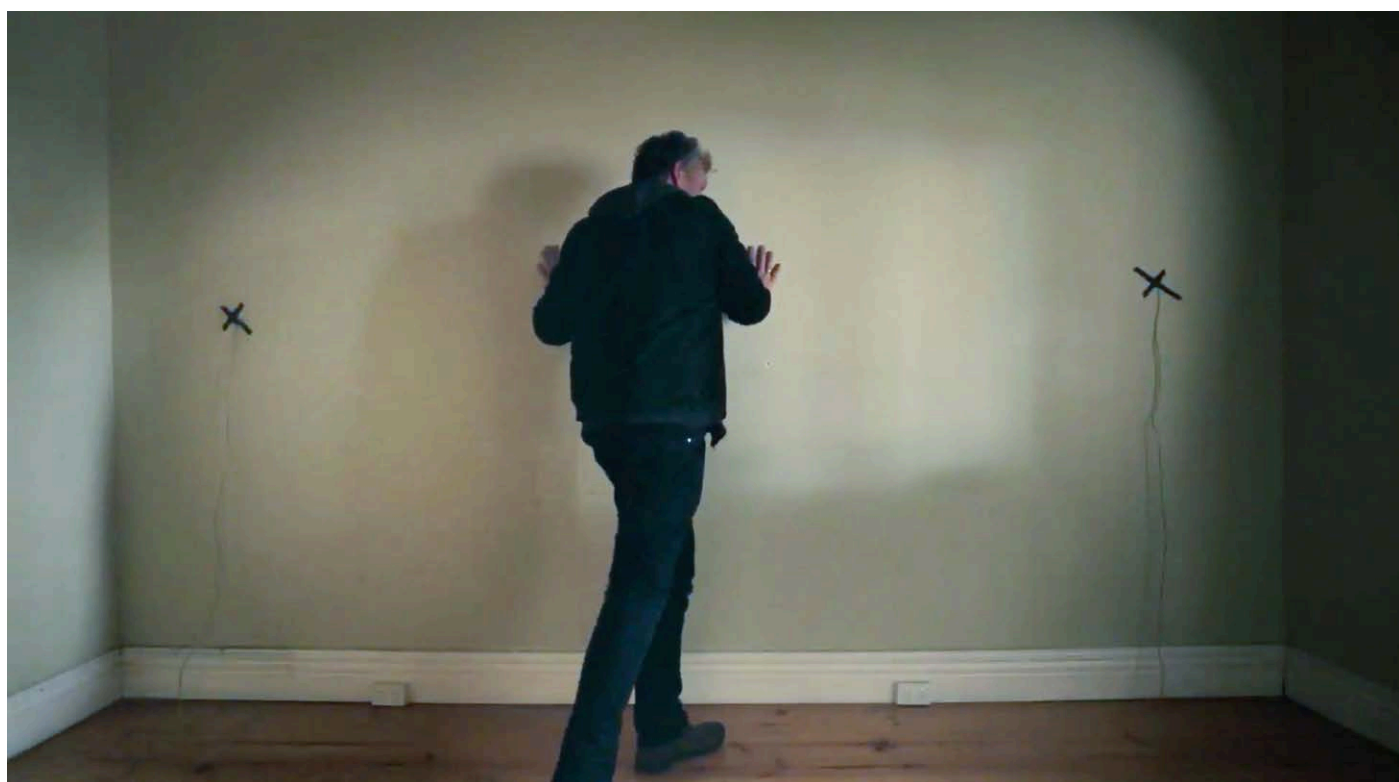


FIGURE 63. *Sensing the wall*, Video Still, Spotswood, 2017



FIGURE 64. *Sensing the wall*, Video Still, Spotswood, 2017

Video Link - <https://vimeo.com/352009120>



With what remains

Pre-demolition house/Nuttelelex oil engineering workshop
Windsor, Victoria

June – October, 2017

Commissioned by Not Fair 2017

This site was an abandoned mid 1900s semi-detached house in Windsor, Victoria. The site had previously been used as an engineering workshop and storage space for the Nuttelelex Oil factory situated next door.

The site's state of decay presented challenges in terms of how to respond to the conditions, utilising the energy to guide my research.

The work was exhibited as part of the Not Fair 2017 program.



FIGURE 66. Camera Obscura, Windsor, 2017



FIGURE 67. Camera Obscura, Windsor, 2017

Video Link - <https://vimeo.com/246767762>



FIGURE 68. *With what remains*, Kitchen cut, Windsor, 2017





FIGURE 70. *With what remains*, Floor cut, carpet peel, Camera Obscura, Windsor, 2017

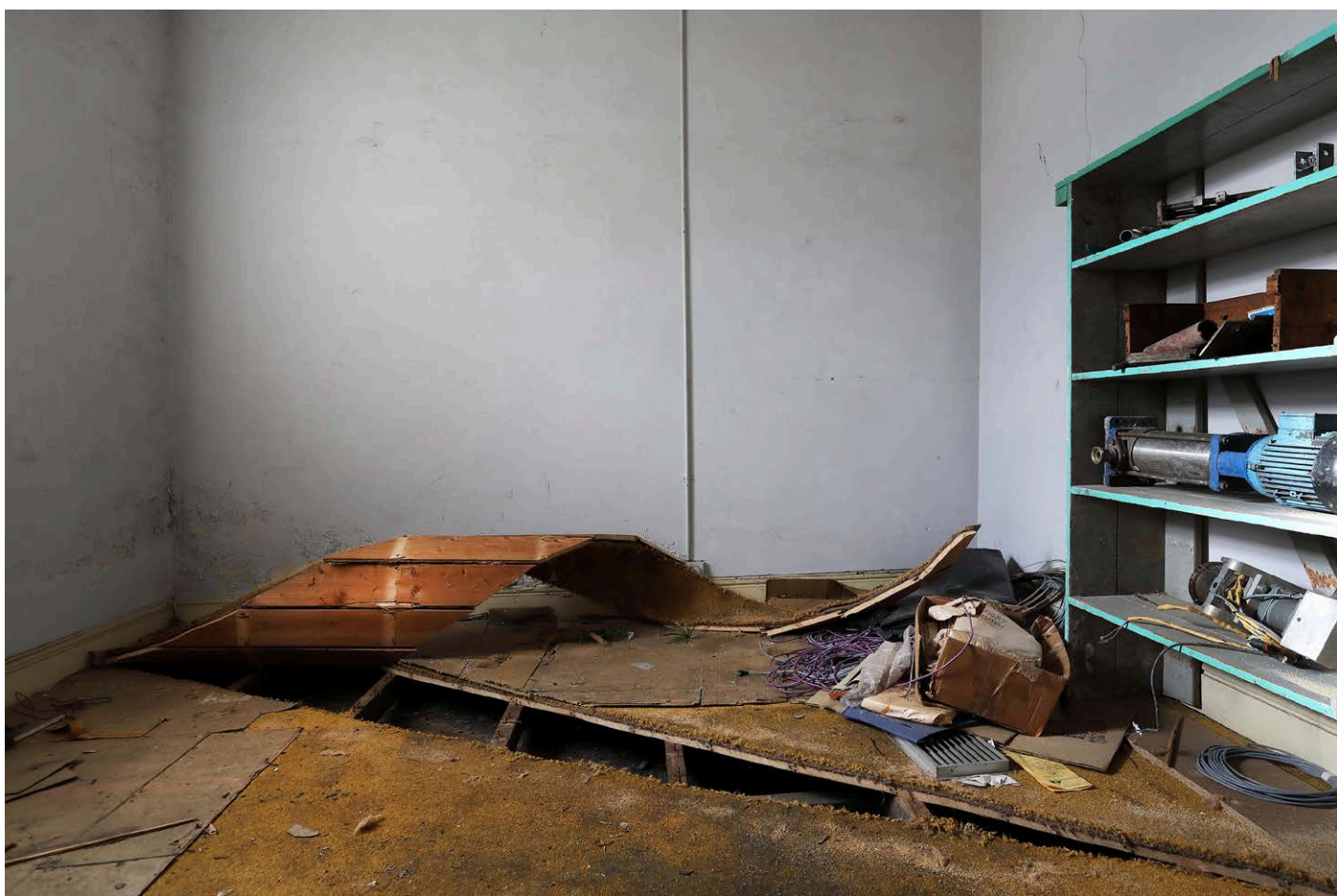


FIGURE 71. *With what remains*, Floor cut, Windsor, 2017





FIGURE 73. *With what remains*, Carpet cut, Corner cut, Table cut, Oil pour, Windsor, 2017



FIGURE 74. *With what remains*, Carpet cut, Corner cut, Table cut, Oil pour, Windsor, 2017





FIGURE 76. *With what remains*, Wardrobe cut, Windsor, 2017



FIGURE 77. *With what remains*, Wardrobe cut (Remnant found objects), Windsor, 2017



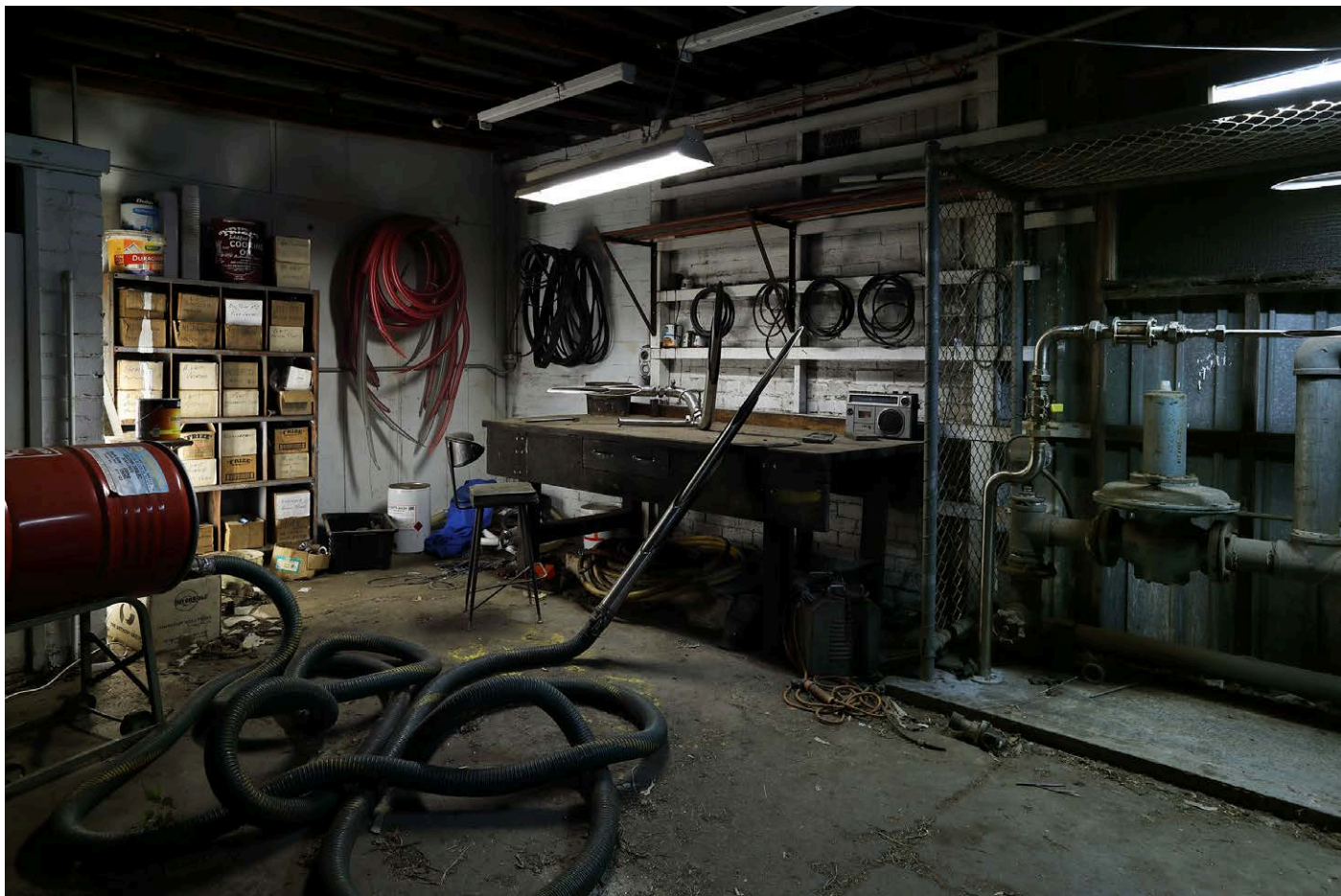


FIGURE 79. *With what remains*, Recomposed workshop, Severed pipes, Windsor, 2017

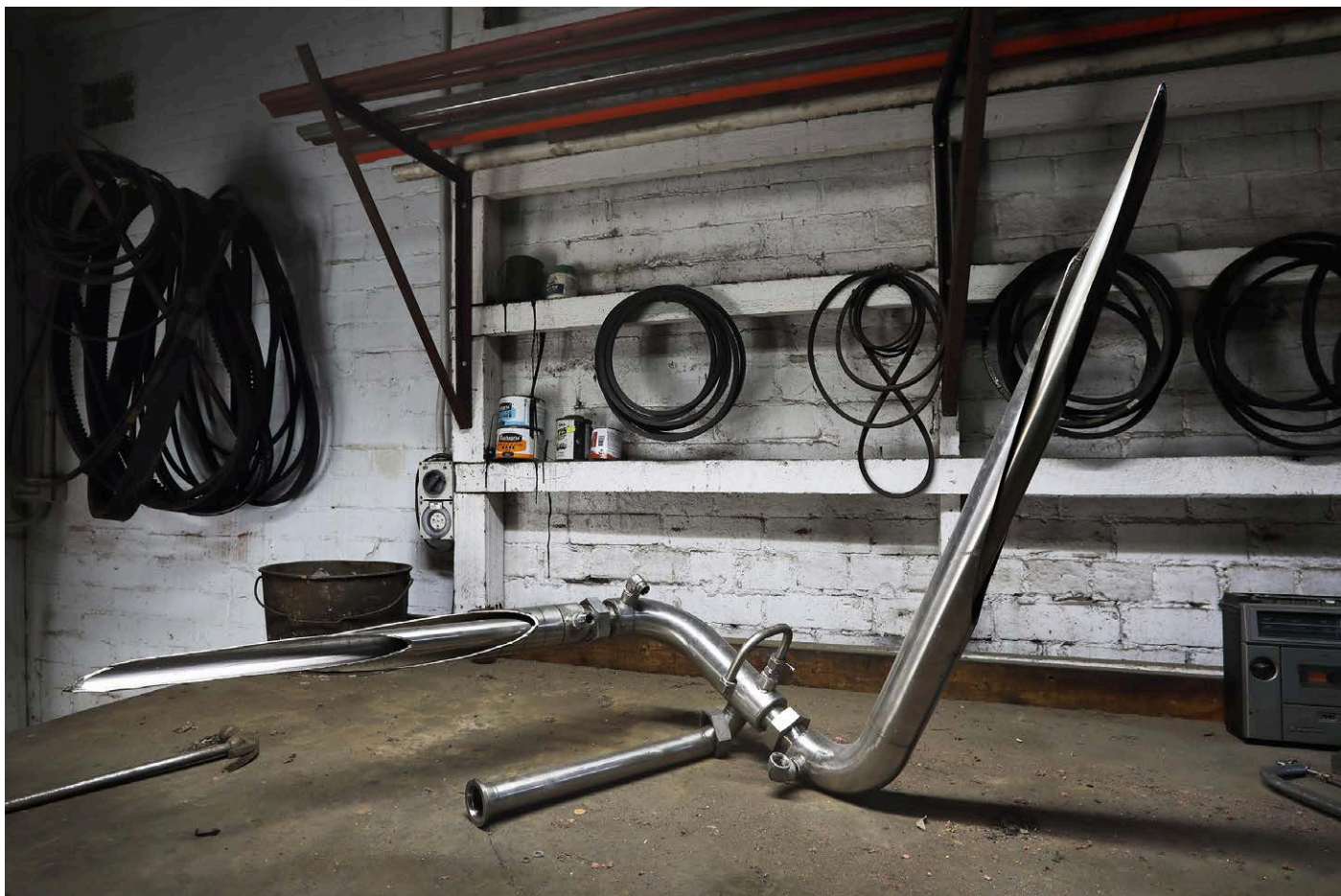


FIGURE 80. *With what remains*, Recomposed workshop, Severed pipes, Windsor, 2017



FIGURE 81. *With what remains*, Introduced severed pipes, Windsor, 2017



FIGURE 82. *With what remains*, Introduced severed pipes, Windsor, 2017

SUPPER ROOM



This Hall Breathes / Crossing the Floor

Pre-partial demolition
Broadmeadows Town Hall
Broadmeadows, Victoria

January 2018 – October 2019

Commissioned by KTA Architects and City of Hume

Initially built in the 1950s, Broadmeadows Town Hall featured an extensive supper room and performance hall that was a central community centre for events ranging from citizenship ceremonies, formals and political rallies.

This investigation was part of a public art sculptural commission situated within a major redevelopment of this site. Through this investigation I had the freedom to explore the site in its transition prior to complete closure and partial destruction.

Working through the concept stage of this commission the research here explored the site through film, sound and performance. These developmental studies feed into the realisation of a major intervention work in the supper room space and followed through with the development of the final permanent sculptural work that now features in the front foyer of the hall.



FIGURE 84. Recording the Supper Room floor, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018



FIGURE 85. Recording the Supper Room floor, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018

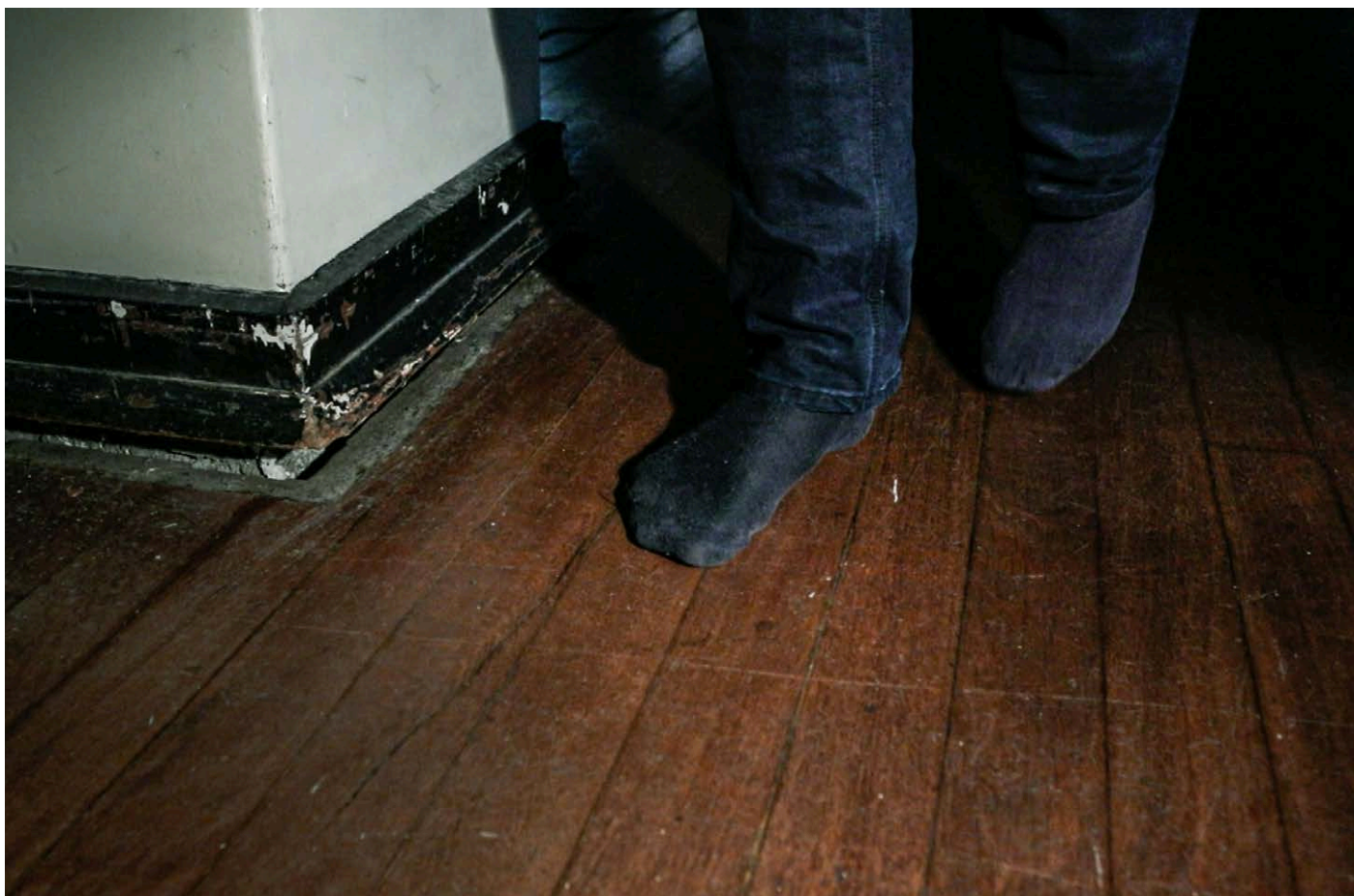


FIGURE 86. Filming Walking the Floor, Supper Room floor, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018



FIGURE 87. Filming Walking the Floor, Supper Room floor, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018





FIGURE 89. Filming the stage curtains, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018

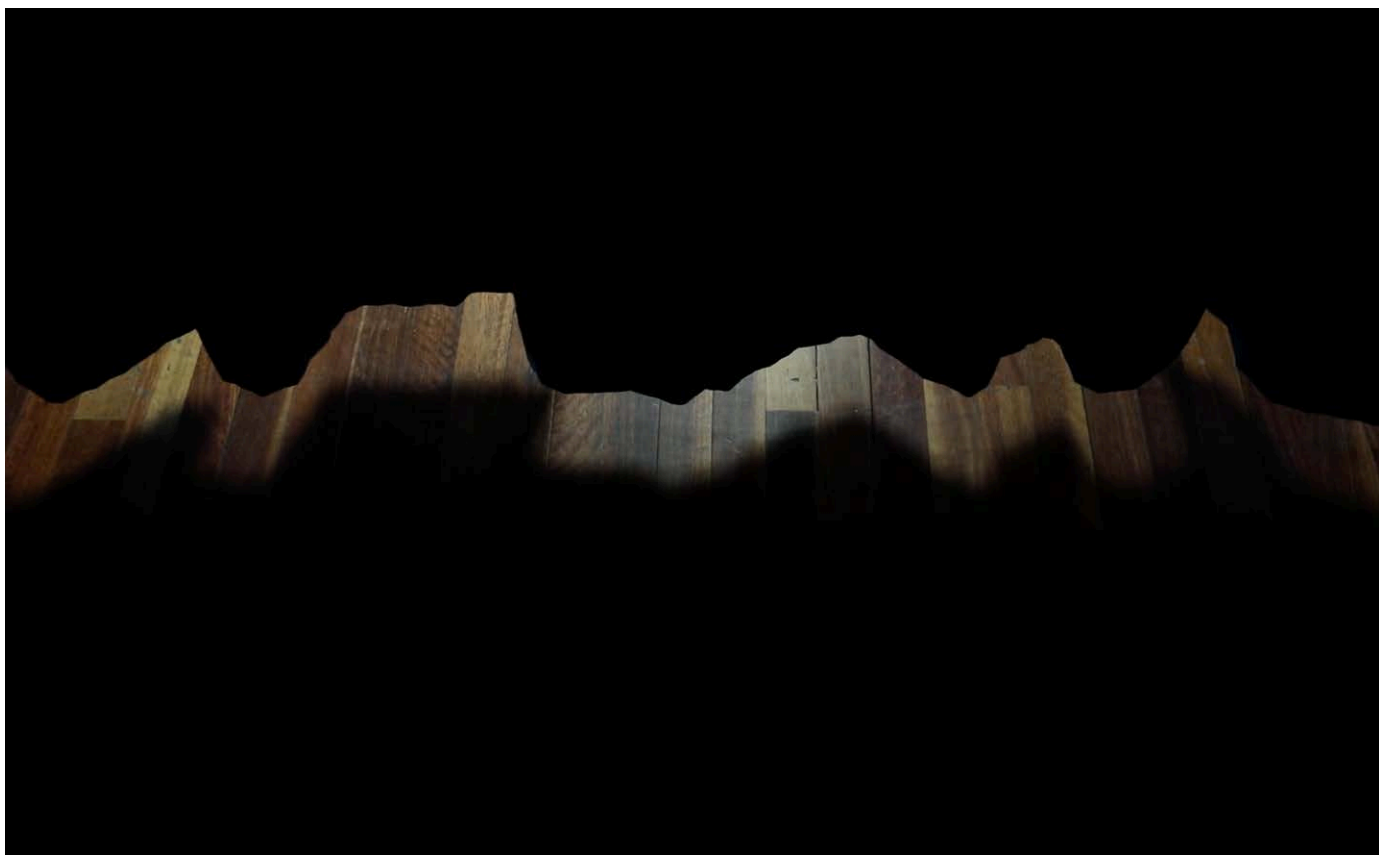


FIGURE 90. *This Hall Breathes*, Video Still, Light under curtain, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018

Video Link - <https://vimeo.com/196346837>



FIGURE 91. Cutting the floor, Supper Rom, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018



FIGURE 92. Cutting the floor, Supper Rom, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018





FIGURE 94. Recording bain marie lids, Supper Room Kitchen, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018



FIGURE 95. Recording bain marie lids, Supper Room Kitchen, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018

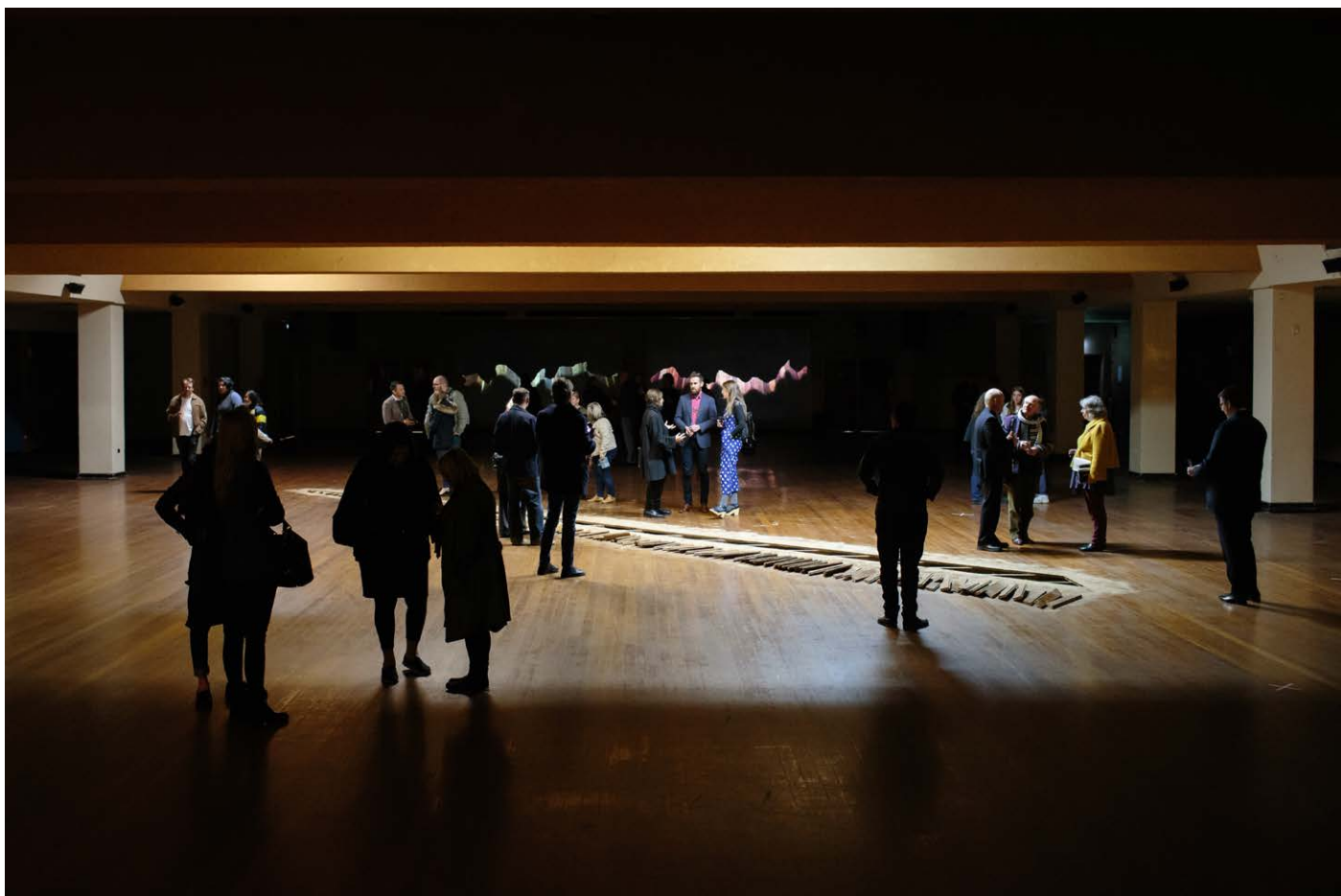


FIGURE 96. *This Hall Breathes*, Exhibition Opening, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018



FIGURE 97. *This Hall Breathes*, Exhibition Opening, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018





FIGURE 99. *This Hall Breathes*, Exhibition Opening, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018



FIGURE 100. *This Hall Breathes*, Exhibition Opening, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018

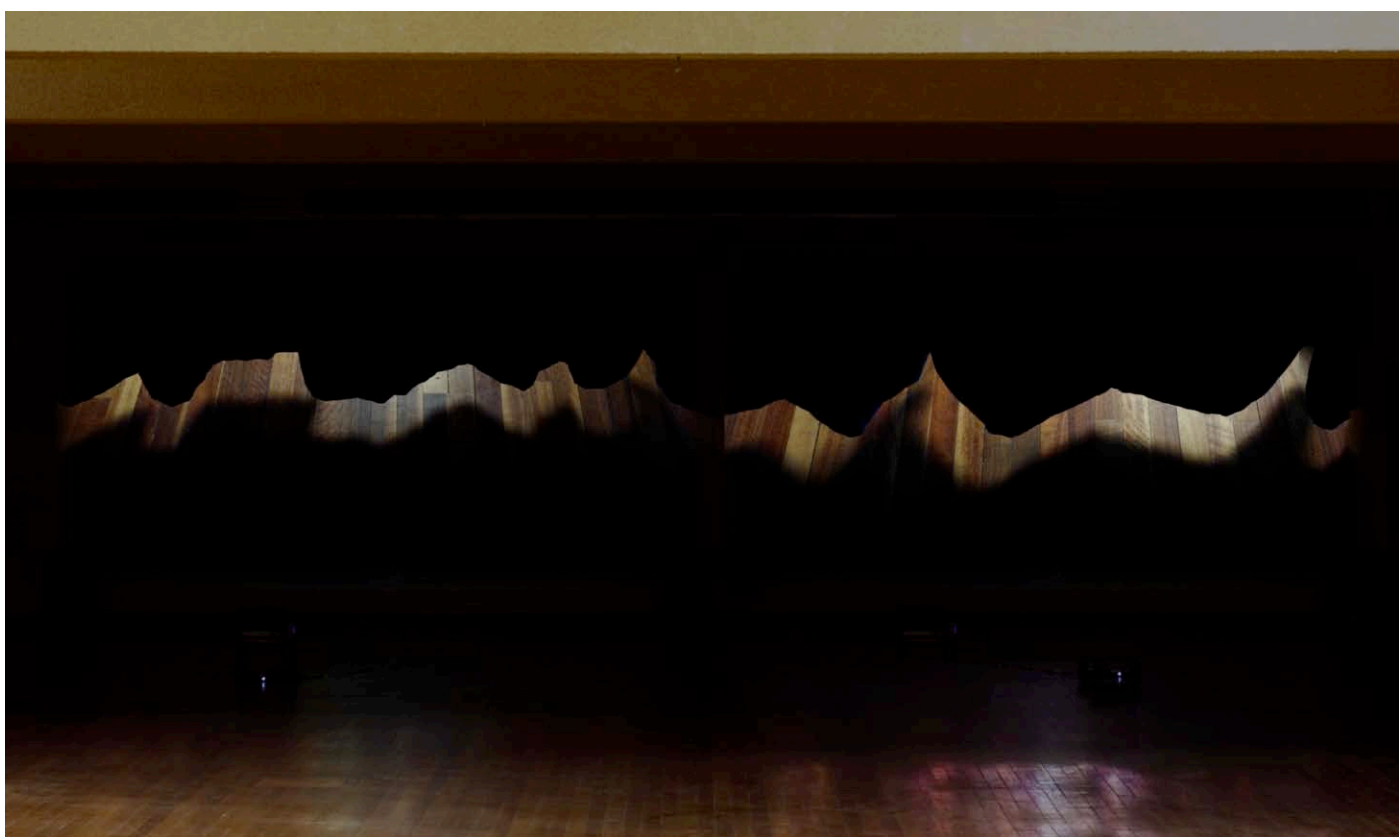


FIGURE 101. *This Hall Breathes*, Exhibition Opening, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018

Subsurface

Commission and Masters research exhibition
Town Hall Broadmeadows Gallery
Broadmeadows, Victoria
2019



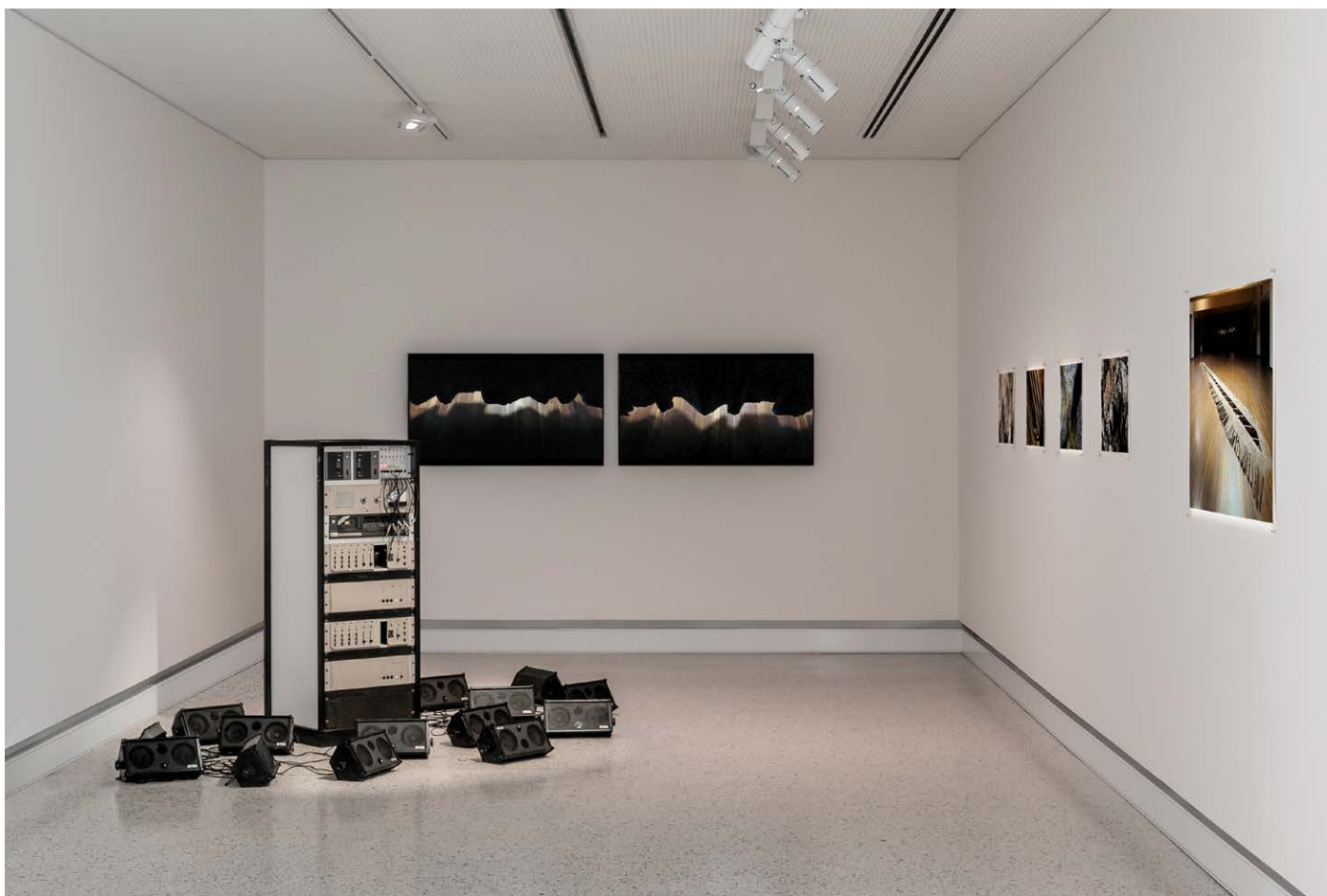


FIGURE 103. *Subsurface* Research Exhibition, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018 Photo: Dan Preston

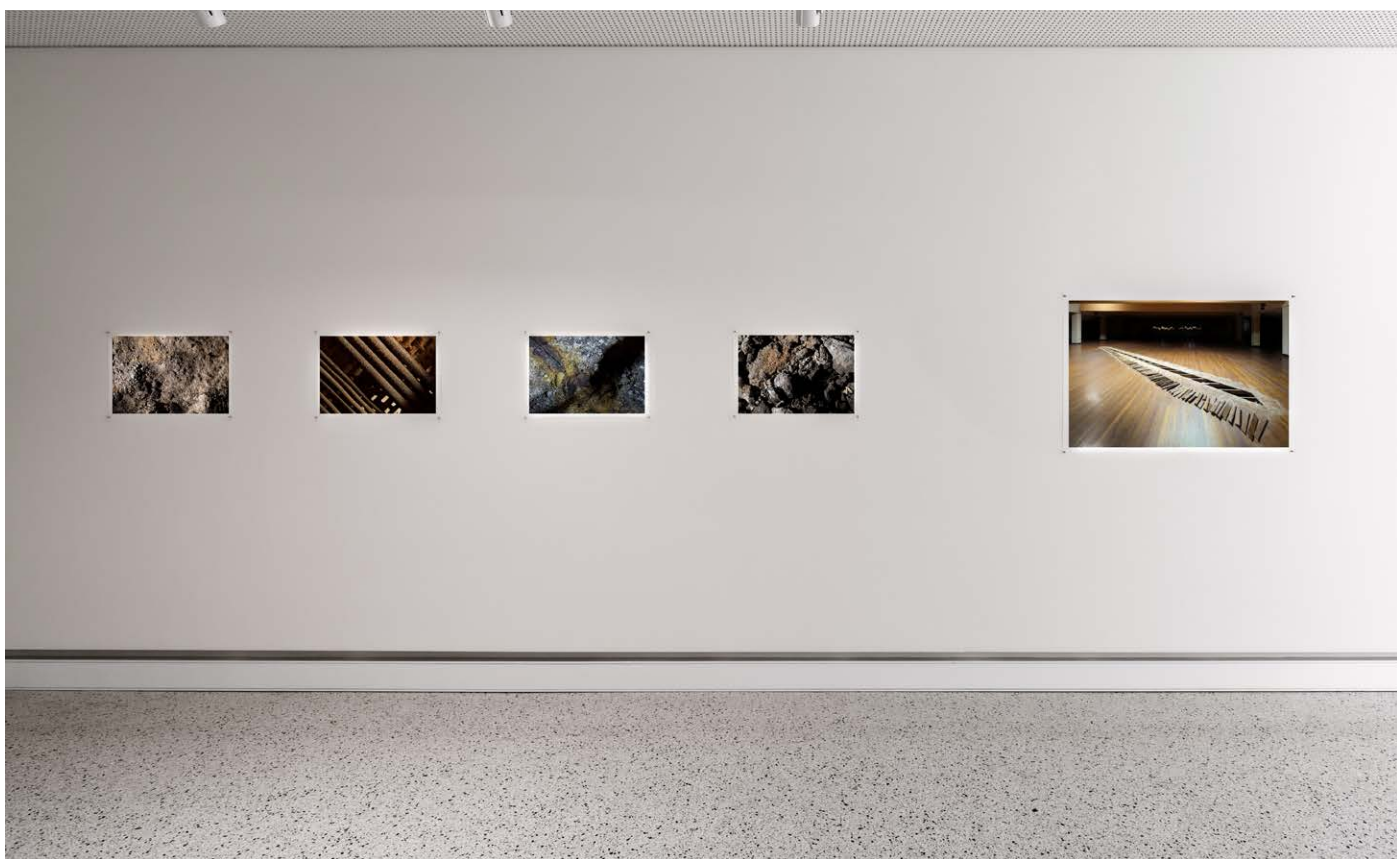


FIGURE 104. *Subsurface* Research Exhibition, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018 Photo: Dan Preston



FIGURE 105. *Subsurface* Research Exhibition, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018 Photo: Robbie Rowlands



FIGURE 106. *Crossing the Floor*, under floor surface, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018

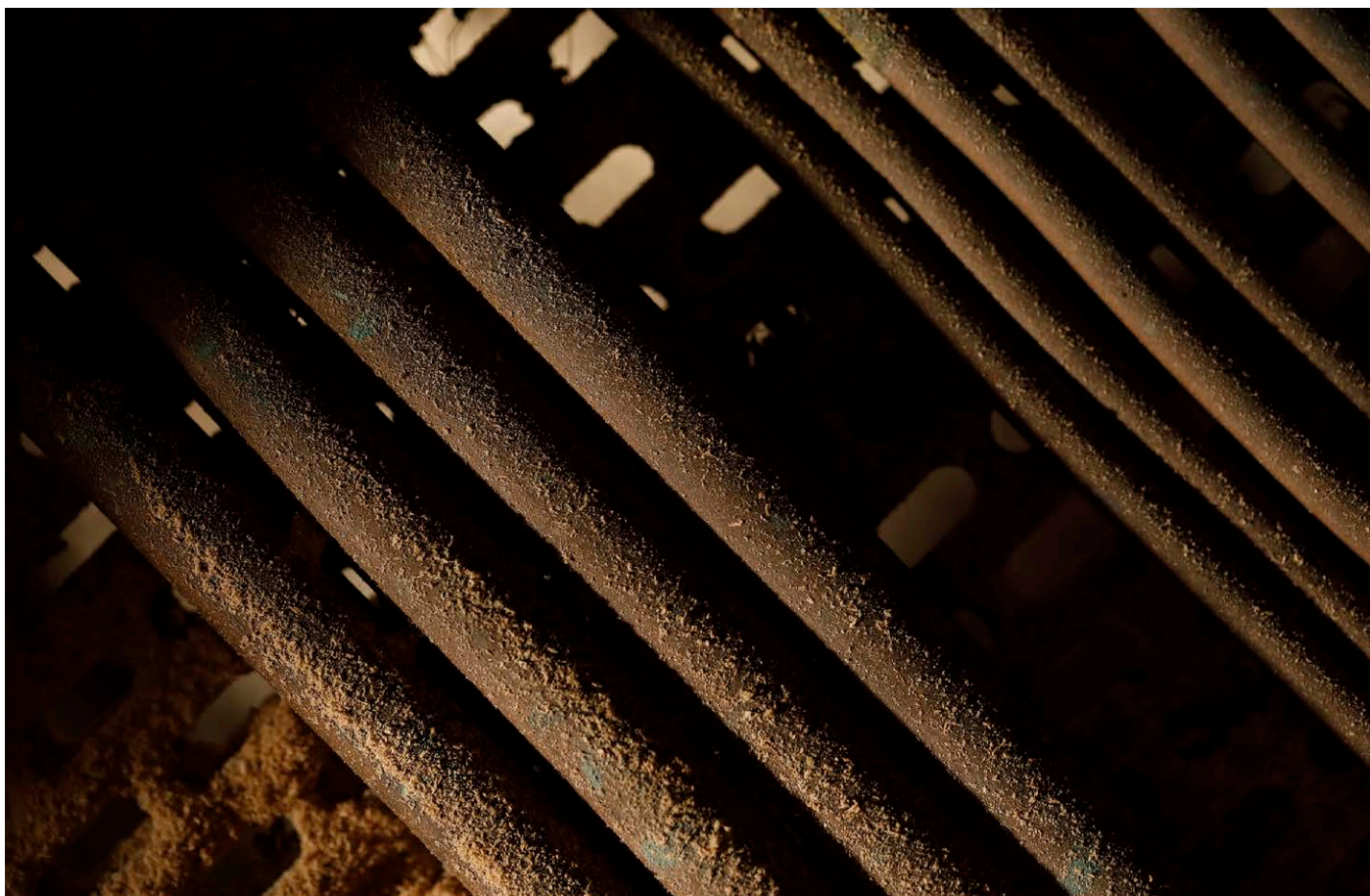


FIGURE 107. *Crossing the Floor*, under floor surface, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018



FIGURE 108. *Crossing the Floor*, under floor surface, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018



FIGURE 109. *Crossing the Floor*, under floor surface, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018



FIGURE 110. *Subsurface* Research Exhibition, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018 Photo: Dan Preston

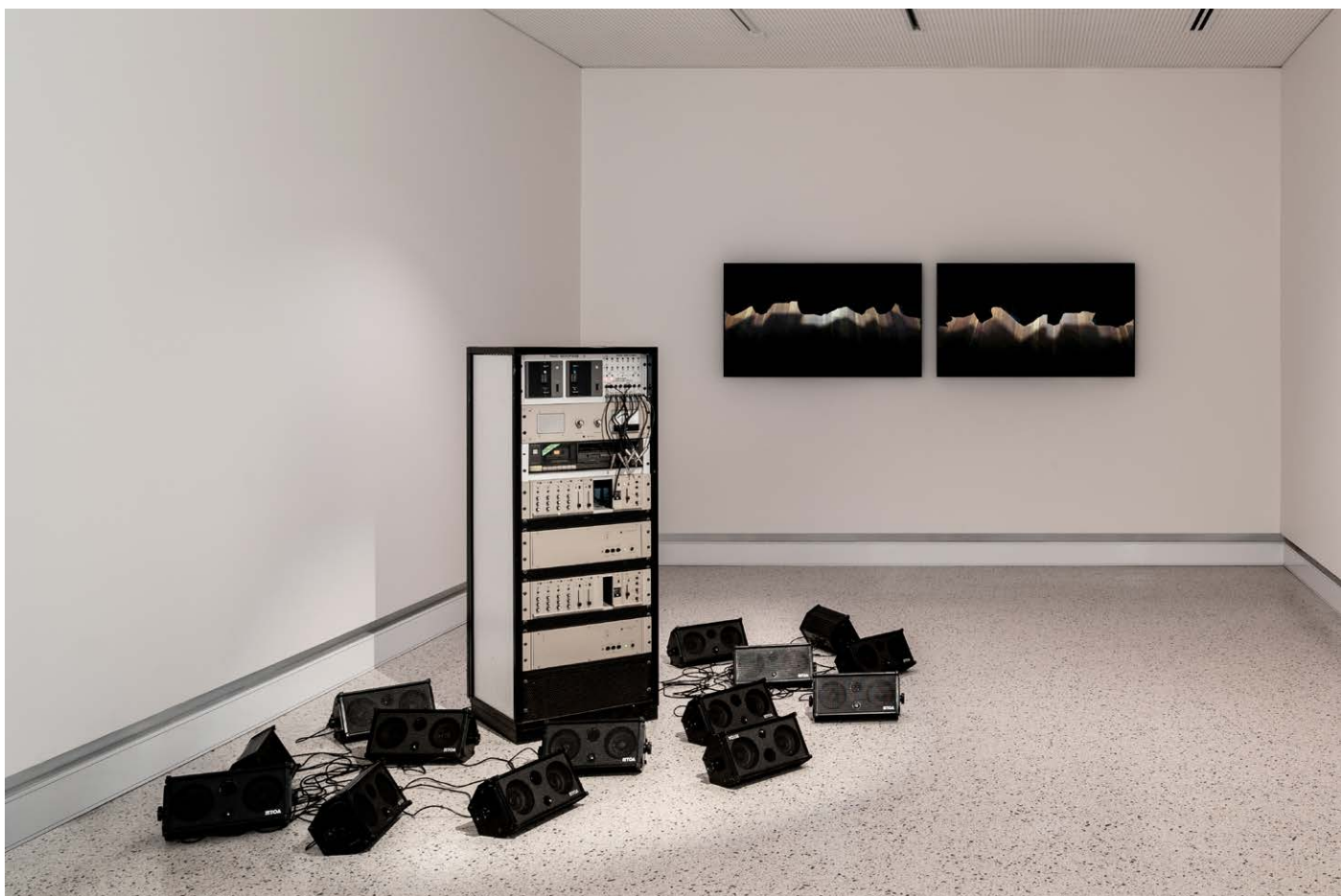


FIGURE 111. *Subsurface* Research Exhibition, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018 Photo: Dan Preston

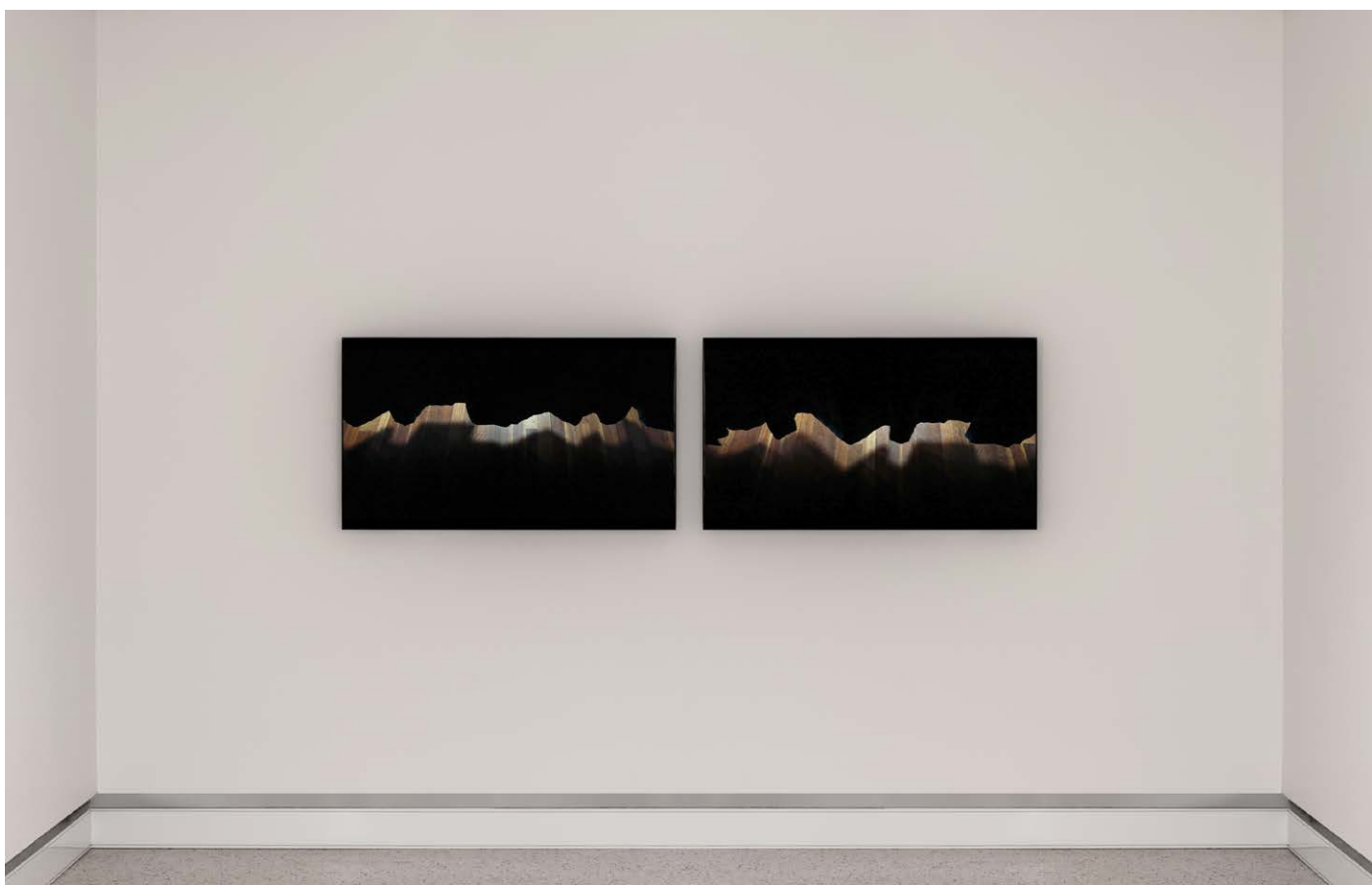


FIGURE 112. *Subsurface* Research Exhibition, Broadmeadows Town Hall, 2018 Photo: Dan Preston





Parliament – The Owls

Retired owl ornament museum
Nine Mile, Stephens Creek, Broken Hill, NSW

June – October 2018

Commissioned by Broken Hill council

This site investigation was set within a residency program and exhibition in the outback town of Broken Hill, New South Wales. The museum known as The Owl Barn, was created by Mitch and Val Powell in the 1990s. At its peak it held a collection of over 1000 owl ornaments.

Due to its positioning next to the river bed, which remained dry most of the time, it did suffer flooding and the main building was devastated by a fire. Mitch had been encouraged, with a struggle, to leave the property in 2017. He was moved to a home in Broken Hill where he remains today.

The research here brings forth a consideration of approaches to a site, dealing with the conditions in play in terms of rights and responsibilities, and revealed the rich outcomes of persevering with these negotiations.

The documentation featured here is part of an expanded body of work created for the residency exhibition outcome. This includes an original museum cabinet sourced from the site which features a back-projected image and sound sequence. Documentation for a one night event exhibited back in site which featured site projected images and sound.

The full Nearness exhibition can be accessed at www.nearnessexhibitionbrokenhill.com



FIGURE 115. *Parliament - The Owls*, The Owl Barn, Stephens Creek, Broken Hill, 2019



FIGURE 116. *Parliament - The Owls*, The Owl Barn, Stephens Creek, Broken Hill, 2019





FIGURE 118. *Parliament – The Owls*, photographic captures of owl collection, back projected on recovered Owl Barn museum cabinet images, Nearness exhibition, West Darling Machine Preservation Society, 2018 - Video Link - <https://vimeo.com/302792038>



FIGURE 119. *Parliament – The Owls*, photographic captures of owl collection, back projected on recovered Owl Barn museum cabinet images, Nearness exhibition, West Darling Machine Preservation Society, 2018



FIGURE 120. *Parliament – The Owls, Nearness Exhibition*, captured owl ornament collection, re-projected at site
The Owl Barn – Stephens Creek, Broken Hill, 2018



FIGURE 121. *Parliament – The Owls, Nearness Exhibition*, captured owl ornament collection, re-projected at site
The Owl Barn – Stephens Creek, Broken Hill, 2018 - Video Link - <https://vimeo.com/306123986>